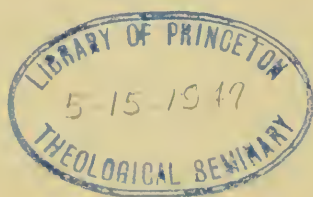




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PUBLICATIONS OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

EARLY BAPTISTS OF VIRGINIA.

Third annual meeting of the Society at New York, May 10, 1856.

On the motion of the Rev. A. D. Gillette, M. A., Pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, New York, seconded by the Rev. GEORGE W. EATON, D.D. Professor in Madison University, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of this Society be presented to the Rev. Dr. HOWELL, for his Address of this evening, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

W. R. WILLIAMS, President,

J. N. BROWN, Corresponding Secretary.

A standing resolution of the Board of Curators, directs a notice to be prefixed to all publications issued by them, except strictly official documents, that the authors of the respective productions are alone responsible for their statements and opinions.

The Early Baptists of Virginia:

AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN NEW YORK,

BEFORE THE

AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

MAY 10th, 1856.

BY

ROBT. BOYTE C. HOWELL, D. D.,

PASTOR OF MAIN STREET (SECOND) BAPTIST CHURCH,

RICHMOND, VA.

"Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."—SOLOMON.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESS OF THE SOCIETY,
No. 118 ARCH STREET.
1857.

EARLY BAPTISTS OF VIRGINIA.

MR. PRESIDENT, CURATORS, AND GENTLEMEN,
OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY:—

As a theme befitting your third anniversary, you have assigned me "The Early Baptists of Virginia." I accept it with pleasure, and have only to regret my inability, and want of time, to do ample justice to their name and character. In making familiar to the popular mind nearly all other subjects connected with the progress of "the Mother of States," every form of intellectual communication, "whether history or novel, song or oration," has been exhausted. In the department of *Baptist History* we have "a vintage whose fruit remains almost untouched." By Asplund and Leland, Burkitt and Read, Backus and Benedict, Semple and Taylor, and some others, we have faithful, but brief, detached, and imperfect chronicles. Writers unfriendly to their principles, and disposed to disparage both their motives and labors—such as Jarrett and Burke, Hawks and White, Alexander and Foote—have referred to them somewhat at large; but their statements evince so great a want, both of respect and information, and, withal, are so distorted by prejudice and aversion, that, as we shall hereafter see more fully, they are rendered wholly unreliable. Their works are, in this respect at least, singularly unworthy of their distinguished authors. The richest sources, however, of information regarding the early Baptists of Virginia, remain as yet entirely unexplored. They

may be found in the records of the Courts of the several counties, before which they were arraigned in times of persecution, and by whose orders they were fined, and scourged, and imprisoned. And subsequently, in their memorials, and other addresses to the Convention, and to the General Assembly of the State, which were continued from 1774 until 1799; the several complimentary answers returned to them by these bodies; the journals of the Convention, and of the Legislature; the laws, with their history, of the Colony and of the State, as contained in Hening's Statutes at Large, the Revised Laws of Virginia, and the Code of Virginia; the works of Thomas Jefferson; their several memorials to Congress; and their correspondence with Washington and with Jefferson, during the period that those gentlemen occupied the chair of President of the United States, and the responses returned by those distinguished statesmen. From these all, may be learned important and useful lessons. They will aid in furnishing materials for a future full and faithful history, with which, I trust, some Baptist Bancroft, Irving, or Prescott, will, ere long, favor the American people.

For a century past, Virginia has been a prolific fountain, from which has poured forth a perpetual stream of emigration into other quarters, and especially into the States of the South and West. This drain has been constant and excessive. It has carried away multitudes of Baptists. At one period, nearly half of all their numbers, ministers and people, were poured into Kentucky alone. Still a hundred thousand of her citizens are, to-day, communicants in our churches! Nor do they compose the least influential or inactive portion of her population. Their ardent Christian character, and their enlarged and liberal public spirit, are sufficiently attested by the Colleges, male and female, reared by their munificence, and under their guidance; their missionary, and other benevolent organizations; and their

various similar appliances for the elevation of society, for the honor and advancement of religion, and for the salvation of men. In no sense will they, I flatter myself, suffer by a comparison with any other denomination of Christians whatever. Who can look upon all this, and much more that will appear in the progress of this discourse, and not feel an earnest desire to become better acquainted with the men whose labors have been crowned with results so glorious? Who can look upon their immense and daily thickening hosts, and not wish to trace the beginning and early progress, in "the Ancient Dominion," of *principles* now so majestically triumphant? Why have our Virginia fathers remained so long; why should they continue; without any suitable memorial of their exalted position, their noble sacrifices, their indomitable zeal, their extraordinary and successful labors? I rejoice that they are now at length beginning to attract, to a much greater extent than heretofore, the attention of the Christian world. When faithfully recorded, their history will afford another eminent illustration of the power of simple gospel truth, over the hearts of men; its sufficiency, when left to its own influence, to sweep away venerable errors, however deep-seated and inveterate; and the readiness with which it moulds both ecclesiastical, and civil governments, upon the true principles of justice and freedom. It is rich in its incidents, and thrilling in all the events which mark its progress. Its record would fill worthily ample volumes. How, then, can I hope to present it, in one brief address, satisfactorily before this learned and critical society? The proprieties of the occasion admonish me that I must select such alone of its bearings—and they must be very few—as are most important; and examine them so far only as may be necessary to bring them forth into the full relief of truth. I may, perhaps, properly consider to what extent the Baptist element was found existing among the early colonists of

Virginia; the time and circumstances under which their principles were here embodied in visible churches; the subsequent extraordinary progress of these principles among the people; the causes of their unprecedented advancement; the controversies that prevailed among them, with the harmony, doctrinal and practical, at which they at length arrived; their influence in the formation of the government of the State; and the position of their ministers and people in the Commonwealth, intellectual, moral and social. The period within which I shall confine myself is that which commences with the settlement of Jamestown, in 1607, and closes with the termination of the last century.

I. To what extent did the Baptist element exist among the early colonists of Virginia?

The impression prevails that it was not at all apparent until about the time of the organization of the Church at Burleigh, in 1714. That there were no organised Churches is certainly true. The laws were of such severity, and the malignant vigilance with which every overt departure from the established religion was watched, and suppressed, made their formation simply impracticable. The government of Massachusetts satisfied itself with perpetually harassing, punishing, and distressing them. All this Baptists can brave, and did brave. Virginia went much further. The miseries she inflicted fell little short of the Roman Inquisition itself. Still the Baptist element was found largely prevailing among the people, and gradually developing itself, and increasing, until at last it broke forth in all the beauty, and majesty of the morning sun. The proofs of these facts are at hand, and although entirely circumstantial, are nevertheless perfectly satisfactory. The testimonies upon which I rely, are drawn, mainly, from the religious condition of Europe with reference to our principles, from which the colonists came, and of course brought

with them their peculiar sentiments, for some time previous and during this period; and from the history, and laws of the commonwealth itself.

That Baptist principles prevailed to a considerable extent in the "Old World" generally, and in England particularly, and especially among that class of persons most likely to form the masses of immigration, is well known. It is also equally well known, that these principles were then denounced by all denominations, and by every government in Europe, as "blasphemy against God," and "treason against the state." Those, therefore, of whatever position in society, who dared to profess, or to practise them, were at once proscribed as infamous, placed without the protection of the laws, and with fire, and sword, hunted relentlessly from the world. That these principles may be distinctly before our minds, let them here be briefly stated. And this is the more necessary since in modern times, and especially in this country, where so many of them have been embraced by other denominations, they are not so readily recognised as peculiarly Baptist. The supposition is not uncommon in our day, that Baptists depart, and have always heretofore departed, from other evangelical Christians, mainly, if not exclusively, in their opinions as to the subjects, and mode of baptism. On these topics we do indeed, stand alone. They form however, a very small, and by no means the most important part of our peculiarities. Our distinctive doctrines may be set forth synoptically thus:—The Bible, and the Bible alone, is our rule of faith, and obedience; regeneration, and sanctification, are the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer; justification is exclusively by the grace of God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; holy living is the only conclusive proof of true discipleship; membership in the churches, is confined strictly to the professedly regenerate; the government of each church, is

wholly within the church itself; the sacraments are always declaratory of the faith of the recipient; the Church and the State are entirely separate, and neither can legislate for the other; perfect freedom of conscience, and of worship, is an inalienable right of every man; and every man is entitled to full, and equal protection by the government under which he lives, in the exercise of all his privileges, social, political and religious. These constitute, as we believe, the grand outlines of the Gospel of Christ. For them no others can be substituted. Not one of them can be removed without irreparable injury. They bear, as a whole, the stamp and seal of the Almighty God. He who embraces them is necessarily a Baptist. They constitute the sum of the primitive faith, and have in every age, and country, been maintained with the life blood of many a sainted martyr. No church, whatever it may be, that departs from any of them, can long remain evangelical. No State that is not governed by them, can ever be free. And what denomination of Christians, up to the time of which I now speak, concurred with us in these doctrines? The Lutheran, the Calvinist, and English Church, and some minor sects under their influence embrace them in part. They admitted in theory, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, as a rule of faith and obedience; they attributed regeneration to the Holy Spirit, but professedly conveyed it through the administration of the sacraments; and they taught justification by faith alone. In all other respects our doctrines, and those especially which guard the purity of membership, and a scriptural polity in the churches, their separation from the civil government, freedom of conscience and worship, and the right of every citizen, whatever may be his religion, to the full and equal protection of the State, in all his privileges, political, social and religious, were no less offensive to them all, Protestants as they were, than to the most decided Papists. Such are

Baptist doctrines as they were then, and are now, understood in Europe, and as they have been maintained by their advocates in all ages.

The presence of Baptists in England, in no very small numbers, and from the earliest times, will, I presume, be questioned by no one familiar with the religious history of the land of our fathers. Let us consider more fully, the feelings exercised towards them by the government, and their fellow citizens of other churches. Who does not know, that by both, they were hunted, and destroyed with the utmost vigilance? These facts are placed beyond dispute, by Fuller, and Milner, Mosheim, and Neander, as well as by Ivimey, and Anderson, and Neal, and Underhill. As the period of the settlement of Jamestown approached, their numbers multiplied, and churches were springing up in the capital, and throughout the country. The distinguished President of the Council of Trent, said of them, "If you behold their cheerfulness in suffering persecution, the Anabaptists run before all other heretics. If you will have regard to their number, it is like that in multitude they would swarm above all others, if they were not grievously plagued, and cut off with the knife of persecution. If you have an eye to the outward appearance of Godliness, both the Lutherans, and Zuinglians, must needs grant that they far pass them."* The Papists and Protestants destroyed each other, in every possible manner. Never were enemies more bitter, or uncompromising. In but one thing only was it possible for them to agree, and that was the persecution of Baptists. Here they harmonised perfectly, and it is remarkable that in several of their treaties, as recorded by Dr. Merle D'Aubigne, special articles were inserted, binding both parties to use every possible effort to destroy all the Baptists in Europe, "Accordingly," says that distinguished annalist, "Luther, on his return from

* Struggles and Triumphs of Religious Liberty, pp. 88, 89.

Wittenburg, extinguished in Germany, the fanaticism of the Anabaptists.”* How he did this, is for his own fame, but too well remembered, by every reader of the history of those times. Nor were he, and his friends, content to “extinguish” them in their own land, they followed them, with cruel hatred, even to other countries. “The princes of Germany,” says Dr. Cox,† “having discovered by means of intercepted letters, a secret correspondence between the German and English Anabaptists, wrote an epistle to Henry VIII., containing a statement of their pernicious doctrines, and warning him of danger likely to result from their fanatical proceedings, unless prevented by a bold and timely interference.” “This epistle,” of “the princes of Germany,” we are especially informed, was *advised* by Luther, and written by Melancthon. It was their work. How attentive Henry was to its information, is indicated by the convention called according to his command, by Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1530, in which many of their doctrines were formally condemned, and all were pronounced “damnable heresies.” Two proclamations immediately followed for their suppression, and prescribing the severest punishments “against the malicious sects of heretics, who by perversion of Holy Scripture, do induce erroneous opinions, sow dissension among Christian people, and finally disturb the peace and tranquillity of Christian realms, as lately happened in some parts of Germany.”‡ And that Henry’s successors were as vigilant as he was, the prisons of the “United Kingdom,” and the “fires of Smithfield,” bear the amplest testimony. The doctrines of Calvin on this subject are well known. He expressed himself fully, and evinced his doctrine by the apprehension at Geneva, of Servetus, and his martyrdom at the stake. Justly has Bayle said, “Not a reformer of any

* Histy. Ref., Vol. III., p. 305.

† Life of Melancthon, p. 218.

‡ Struggles and Triumphs, p. 92.

eminence can be named, who did not take part in this crusade [against the Baptist,] Luther, Melancthon, Zuingle, Bucer, Bullinger, Calvin, and others abroad; at home, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Barnes, Philpot, Becon, Turner, and many more.”* Our suffering brethren, under the reign of Elizabeth, in an essay to defend themselves against their implacable foes, published a treatise, in which they ventured to protest against persecution for conscience sake. They averred that according to the word of God, “Christ is the supreme head of His church; that the Queen had no right to frame ecclesiastical government, nor to appoint ministers of religion; that the church ought to be composed of believers only; and that the baptism of infants is unlawful.” These annunciations containing truths so *palpable to us*, shocked *all parties* of Pedobaptists, insufferably! John Knox himself, the father of British Presbyterians, responded in a work entitled “An answer to a great number of cavilations, written by an Anabaptist Adversary.” This great man closes his book by thus addressing his antagonist: “It is my full purpose to lay the same to thy charge, if I shall apprehend thee in any commonwealth, where justice against blasphemers may be administered according to God’s word.”

Nor was the temper of the English Bishops more tolerant towards us, than that of the Scotch Presbyters. Many a time have we, in our childhood, been moved to tears by a recital of the sufferings of Cranmer, Ridley and Rogers, who fell in Mary’s reign, martyrs, under the hands of the Papists. Had these very men ever dragged Baptists to the stake, before they themselves suffered a like punishment? Neal’s History of the Puritans details to us many melancholy transactions.† The formidable multiplication of Baptists, and the popularity with the masses of their

* Dict. Art. Anab, Note B.

† Vide Choules’ edition, N. Y., Vol. 2, pp. 353–380.

peculiar principles, induced the government to enact laws commanding a careful search after them, that they might, if possible, be exterminated. A "commission" was named for this purpose, at the head of whom stood Cranmer and Ridley, who executed their bloody office, not only without relentings, but with singular ferocity. Take a single example. Joan of Kent, a distinguished lady, was the first Baptist apprehended. With very little ceremony or delay, she was condemned to be burned alive at the stake. The deed could not be consummated until the death-warrant had received the approval of the king. Young James refused to sign it. He knew her to be one of the best and most excellent of women. Cranmer was deputed to persuade him to consent; and how earnestly and successfully he fulfilled his horrid mission, you, gentlemen, know full well. "He argued," says the historian, "from the law of Moses, according to which blasphemers were to be stoned." He said, "There were impieties against God, which princes, being his deputies, ought to punish, just as the king's deputies were obliged to punish offences against the king's person." "The young king," says Burnett,* "was rather silenced than convinced. He set his hand to the warrant with tears in his eyes, telling Cranmer, that if he did wrong, as it was done in submission to his authority, he [the Archbishop] should answer for it to God." And most sternly, and soon, did God call him to answer. Nor was Rogers much less implicated in this very case. A distinguished gentleman, shocked by the cruelty about to be inflicted upon "an illustrious female," went to Rogers, and besought him to exert his influence to save her; or at least to procure for her a less dreadful death. Rogers, we are told, evinced much indifference, and coolly said, "She ought to be put to death;" and added, "Burning alive is not a cruel death; but easy enough!" On hearing these words, which

* Hist. Ref., Vol. 2, p. 110.

expressed so little regard for the sufferings of others, his friend replied, with great vehemence, at the same time striking Rogers' hand, which he had before grasped firmly, "Well; perhaps it may so happen that you yourselves will one day have your hands full of this mild burning." And so, indeed, in the providence of God, it did happen. These men died no more unjustly, nor cruelly, than did the Baptist victims they had themselves so relentlessly destroyed.

In the days of which I now speak, to believe that membership in the church is confined strictly to the professedly regenerate; that the government of each church is wholly within the church itself; that the sacraments are always declaratory of the faith of the recipient; that the church and the state are wholly separate organisations, and that neither can legislate for the other; that perfect freedom of conscience, and worship, are inalienable rights of all men; and that every citizen is entitled to full and equal protection by the government under which he lives, in the exercise of all his privileges, social, political, and religious; were horrid blasphemy, revolting impiety, rebellion against kings, and treason against government, to exterminate which with fire and sword, the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the Lutherans of Germany, were most anxious to co-operate with the Episcopalians of England, and the Papists every where.

Underhill, with equal eloquence and truth, remarks:—"The Papists abhorred them; for if this heresy prevailed, a church hoary with age, laden with the spoils of many lands, rich in the merchandise of souls, must be broken down and destroyed. The Protestants hated them; for their cherished headship, their worldly alliances, the pomps, and circumstances of state religion, must be debased before the kingly crown of Jesus. The Puritans defamed them; for Baptist sentiments were too liberal, and free, for those who sought a papal authority over conscience, and desired

the sword of the higher powers to enforce their 'Holy discipline.' " "The Baptists were from the beginning," as Locke has truly said, "the friends and advocates of absolute liberty; just and true liberty; equal and impartial liberty."*

In these facts we have a rapid sketch of the religious condition of Europe, with reference to Baptist doctrines, at the time, and for some time previous, and afterwards, of the planting of the colony at Jamestown. Two hundred and fifty years have produced great and favorable changes, even in the Old World, with the light of the West, and especially of the nineteenth century, pouring upon them. Bancroft, who cherishes no sympathy with their religion, and who erroneously imagines that they sprang up with the great christian leaders of that age, eloquently says of the German Baptists, from whom their English brethren did not differ, "With greater consistency than Luther, they applied the doctrines of the reformation to the social positions of life, and threatened an end to priestcraft, and kingcraft, spiritual domination, tithes and vassalage. The party," he adds, "was trodden under foot, with foul reproaches; most arrogant scorn; and its history is written in the blood of myriads of the German peasantry; but its principles secure in their immortality, escaped with Roger Williams, to Providence, and his colony, to witness that naturally, the paths of the Baptists are paths of freedom, of pleasantness, and peace."†

Then, however, no refuge offered itself; no place was safe from persecution, and death. The New World was opened, and thither fled the pursued and harassed of all classes. Baptists flocked, as is well known, in crowds, to Massachusetts, to Rhode Island, to Pennsylvania, to the Carolinas. Did none of them find their way to the deep forests, and secluded valleys, of the oldest of all the colo-

* Struggles and Triumphs, p. 201.

† Hist. U. S., Vol. 2, p. 47.

nies, Virginia? If not, how do you account for a fact so extraordinary? This would have been strange indeed, and especially as Virginia was settled by a London company, and there were in 1643, known to be seven churches in that one city; and in 1689, we have the records of a meeting there, in which the messengers of upwards of a hundred churches assembled to consult upon important subjects connected with the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.* But we are not left wholly to conjecture in this matter, Graham in his history of the United States, speaks of "Puritans," as residing in Virginia.† Why may not Baptists also have been there? It is well known that on the restoration of Charles II., great numbers of the veteran soldiers of Cromwell, escaped to Virginia. It is equally well known that not a few of these soldiers were Baptists. Who were those of whom Dr. Hawks tells us, upon his own authority, that "Their assemblages [in 1680] there is reason to believe, were perverted from *religious* to *treasonable* purposes;" that "they concocted among the *sectaries of their creed*, the subversion of the *government*;" four of whom, at least, were vilely hung, as a warning to the remainder?‡ These charges against them, have a most significant resemblance to those so often alleged against the Baptists in Europe, who, because they condemned the union of church and state, and contended for full religious liberty, were denounced as rebels, condemned as felons, and publicly executed as traitors to their country. Weigh attentively, all these facts, and you will find in them, testimony of no feeble character, that from its very beginning, the Baptist element pervaded the colony of Virginia.

We are now prepared to turn to the colony itself, and by a careful examination of its proceedings, shall ascertain

* Vide Phila. Confession of Faith.

† Vol. 1, p. 219.

‡ History of Episcopacy in Va., pp. 71, 72.

why Baptists principles remained so long in the Commonwealth unembodied in churches.

The men of Virginia, were of a class altogether different from those of Plymouth ; not in intelligence, virtue, and enterprise ; but in habits, tastes, and religion. The colony of the *north*, were inveterate Independents, of the Cromwellian school. Some of them before they crossed the Atlantic, had fled from England, and, for years, resided in Holland. The colony of the *south*, were Cavaliers, of a softer disposition, polished, courtly, proud, and loyal in the highest degree ; not less religious, nor intolerant than their neighbors ; but less austere in their manners, and general deportment. The men of the *north*, abjured the Church of England, and from her tyranny had with difficulty escaped. The men of the *south*, loved that church, brought it with them to their western home, and cherished, and guarded it with an undying reverence. Their schools only shared with their church an equal solicitude, as is evinced by their ample provision for the University of Henrico, the Free Academy of Charles City, and the College of William and Mary. I came here, however, to speak to you of the church, not of education ; and I shall, perhaps, best present their carefulness of its interests, by referring to some of the laws by which they essayed to give it power and support.

The organic law, on the subject of religion, is contained in the charter of the colony, by James I., and dated April 10th, 1606, as follows :—“ We do specially ordain, charge, and require, the said Presidents and Councils, and the ministers of the said several colonies respectively, [First and Second of Virginia] within their several limits and precincts, that they, with all diligence, care, and respect, do provide that the true word and service of God, and christian faith, be preached, planted, and used, not only within every of the said several colonies and plantations, but also as much as they may, among the savage people which do, or

shall adjoin unto them, or border upon them, according to the doctrines, rites, and religion, now professed and established, within our realm of England, and that they shall not suffer any person, or persons, to withdraw any of the subjects, or people, inhabiting, or who shall inhabit, within any of the said several colonies, and plantations, from the same, or from their due allegiance unto us, our heirs, and successors, as their immediate sovereign under God ; and if they shall find within any of the said colonies, and plantations, any person, or persons, so seeking to withdraw any of the subjects of us, our heirs, or successors, or any of the people of those lands, or territories, within the precincts aforesaid, they shall, with all diligence, him, or them so offending, cause to be apprehended, arrested, and imprisoned, until he shall fully and thoroughly reform himself, or otherwise when the cause so requireth, that he shall with all convenient speed, be sent into our realm of England, here to receive condign punishment, for his, or their said offence, or offences.”* With this platform upon which to proceed, the details of Ecclesiastical Law during the first fifteen or twenty years of the colony, emanated exclusively from its Governors for the time being. Among the earliest, we have the Code of Sir Thomas Dale, promulgated in 1611, in which we have the following enactments:—“ There is not one man, nor woman in this colony now present, nor hereafter to arrive, but shall give up an account of his, and their faith, and religion, and repair unto the minister, that by his conference with them, he may understand and gather whether heretofore, they have been sufficiently instructed, and catechised in the principles and grounds of religion ; whose weakness and ignorance, the minister finding, and advising them in love, and charity, to repair often unto him, to receive therein a greater measure of knowledge ; if they shall refuse to repair unto him, and he,

* Hening's Statutes at Large, Vol. I., pp. 68, 69.

the minister, give notice thereof, unto the governor, or the chief officer of that town, or fort, wherein he, or she, the parties so offending, shall remain, the governor shall cause the offender, for the first time of refusal, to be whipped; for the second time, to be whipped twice, and to acknowledge his fault upon the Sabbath day, in the congregation; and for the third time, to be whipped every day, until he hath made the same acknowledgment, and asked forgiveness of the same, and shall repair unto the minister to be further instructed as aforesaid; and upon the Sabbath, when the minister shall catechise, and demand any question concerning his faith, and knowledge, he shall not refuse to make answer, upon the same peril.”* Of this, and similar laws, which continued to be announced during the administration of the London Company, it is proper to say, that though formally promulgated, they were almost wholly inoperative, since neither the circumstances, nor the temper of the people, rendered their execution practicable.

It was also the practice of each Governor, when he came into office, to introduce his own code, and to supersede that of his predecessor. And after the organization of “The Grand Assembly,” it was a mode of legislation peculiar to those times, to repeal at each session, all former laws, and re-enact them in the very words in which they were originally passed.† Of this body Henning says, “If we may judge by the subject matter embraced by such acts as have been preserved, the Legislature was exclusively occupied in promoting an uniformity to the doctrines, and discipline of the Church of England, and in enforcing attendance at Church, and other religious exercises.”‡ It was provided by the Act of 1623, that in every plantation, or settlement, there should be a house or room set apart for the worship of God,” which *worship* was commanded, and

* Laws, &c., Strachey, London, 1612.

† Henning's Statutes at Large, Vol. I., p. 120.

‡ Ibid.

required to be strictly “in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of the Church of England.” For these places of worship ministers were provided by the state, and their salaries paid out of the public treasury, by a tax levied upon the people for that purpose.”* “To preserve the purity of doctrine, and unity of the church,” it was enacted during the session of 1643, that “All *ministers* shall be conformable to the *orders*, and *constitution* of the Church of England; that no others shall be permitted to *preach* or *teach*, publicly or privately;” and that “the Governor and Council shall take care that all *nonconformists depart the colony*, with all conveniency.”† The statute of England, of 3rd James I., was at this session adopted, “Concerning Popish recusants,” and put into full force in Virginia; and in 1657, the severest laws were adopted for the suppression of the sect known as Quakers. In the legislative attention of 1661, especially, the church shared very largely. The first nine acts had exclusive reference to ecclesiastical affairs. They provided that a church should be built, and vestries appointed in each parish; that glebes, with convenient houses built thereon, should be purchased for the minister of each parish, by the state; that ministers should receive for their salaries, each eighty pounds sterling, annually, (which was afterwards changed to sixteen thousand pounds of tobacco) to be levied by the vestry, upon the citizens of each parish respectively; that no minister should preach without ordination from a Bishop in England; that every person not so ordained attempting to preach, publicly or privately, should be silenced by the Governor and Council, and if he persisted, should be banished from the colony; that no other catechism should be taught, but that contained in the Book of Common Prayer; that on every Sunday, each person, not providentially prevented, should attend the parish church of his

* Hening’s Statute at Large, Vol. I., &c.

† Hening et supra.

own parish, under a penalty for failure, of fifty pounds of tobacco; and that each *nonconformist*, should pay *twenty pounds sterling*, for every month's absence from the regular established church of the parish in which he resided; and if absent a year, should be apprehended, and required to give security for his good behaviour; which, if he failed to do, he was to be imprisoned until he either did give security, or conformed to the church.*

These, and similar laws, governed the people of Virginia, except during the brief period of the Protectorate, when the affairs of the Church were taken from the Legislature, and placed in the hands of the parishes. On the accession of Charles II., however, things returned to their former condition, and the laws were even more stringent than before, and thus continued up to the time of the American revolution,† with the melioration, as will be seen hereafter, of the Act of Toleration, under William and Mary. If Baptists were present in the colony, what could they do? They durst not make themselves known. They had no alternative but to endeavor in solitude to serve God, until his providence should deliver them from the oppressions which they then suffered. It is intimated, however, and especially by Episcopal writers, who seem desirous to apologise for them, that these laws, in their severity, were never enforced. They tell us that "The Church was provided for; but it is due, both to the governors and the governed, [to say] that on the one hand there was as little disposition to enforce, as there was on the other to submit to their penalties." Yet they admit elsewhere that Baptists, especially, subsequently suffered from them great injustice and oppression.‡ Gentlemen, I revere the memory of these early colonists. My own loved ancestors were among them. But to conceal

* See Legislative Journals, and Hening's Statutes at Large, Vols. I., II.

† Hening's Stat., Vol. I., preface, p. xv.

‡ Hist. Epis. Ch. in Va., p. 24, et seq.

the truth, even were it lawful, is both useless and impossible. History speaks in a voice not to be suppressed, and she tells us that "persecutions for conscience' sake" were rife during Virginia's whole colonial period. Who were those inhabitants of Montserrat, in the West Indies, of whom the Jesuit, White, speaks, in his "Pilgrims of Maryland," and of whom, under date of 1634, he tells us incidentally, that they were driven from *Virginia* "for their religious opinions?"* Have we not already seen that four men, soldiers of Cromwell, were hung, evidently for their religious opinions? The penalties prescribed by these laws were, as Hening declares, in 1640, inflicted to the letter upon a citizen, whose name he does not record. Did not Stevenson Reek suffer, in 1643, for *religious offences*, the most revolting severities? He "stood in the pillory two hours, with a label on his back, paid a fine of fifty pounds, and was imprisoned at the pleasure of the Governor."† Were not the missionaries, Thompson, Knolles, James and Harrison, sent to Virginia by the General Court of Boston, banished, in 1648, from the colony? And were not their congregations, though meeting only in private, violently dispersed, and many of them imprisoned during indefinite periods?‡ And James Pyland, the member from Isle of Wight, that Baptist county; what was "his, the said Pyland's blasphemous catechism," for the issuing of which he was, in 1652, expelled from the House of Burgesses?§ Was not the member from Norfolk also expelled from the House, in 1663, on a religious account?|| And upon what authority were Baptists, in later years, apprehended, imprisoned, fined, and tortured? Would to God, gentlemen, these laws, in themselves so loathsome, had always remained "a dead letter." But, alas! the sufferings, and

* Annals of Annapolis, p. 23.

† 2 Burk, 67; Eccl. Va., p. 51.

‡ Holmes' Annals, 289; Savage's Winthrop, 334.

§ Hening's Stat., Vol. I., pp. 374-5.

|| Ut. Sup. Vol. 2, p. 198.

groans, and blood, of many a victim, clamoring in our ears, reveal, on the part of Virginia's rulers, not a soft forbearance, but deeds of cruelty and death! Under the operation of laws so stringent; watched by vigilant enemies on every side; no minister, known to be such, permitted to reside in the colony; is it surprising that no churches existed, and no ordinances were publicly administered?

The Baptist element in the Virginia colony is still more apparent by yet another form of testimony, which I am now prepared to lay before you. We trace it here, as we do through the dark ages in Europe, by the laws enacted for its suppression, and the official records of persecutions. Solicitous as they may be to remain concealed, one clue leads invariably to the detection of Baptists. Their consciences compel them, and, at whatever hazard, they will withhold their children from baptism. Attempt to compel them; you will find them immovable by any power of earth. With these well known facts before us, we turn to "the Grand Assembly," and offer you a specimen of its legislation. It is published as the 111 Act of the session of 1661-2, as follows: "Whereas, many schismatical persons, out of their averseness to the orthodox established religion, or out of the new-fangled conceits of their own heretical inventions, refuse to have their children baptised: Be it therefore enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that all persons that, in contempt of the divine sacrament of baptism, shall refuse, when they may carry their child [children] to a lawful minister in that county, to have them baptized, shall be amerced two thousand pounds of tobacco; half to the informer, half to the public."* Against whom, I may now inquire, was this law, and were others like it, directed? Modern writers have alleged, I know, that it must have been directed against the Quakers. It was certainly applicable to them; but their numbers and influence

* Henning's Statutes at Large, Vol. 2, pp. 165, 166.

then, were very inconsiderable. Look carefully into all its parts, and you must see that it contemplated others also. And who could they have been but Baptists? The evil it was designed to correct seems, in the opinion of our legislators, to have been wide-spread and most alarming. Study, if you please, its language. It is instructive. The preamble declares that there were "*many*" of those persons in the colony, who refused to have their children baptized; that they did not *neglect* merely, but "*refused*" to have this rite administered to their little ones; that this refusal was based upon *principle*, which the act pronounced to have been "*averseness* to the established religion," or "the new-fangled conceits of their own heretical inventions." They were not, therefore, infidels, wicked men, people careless of their obligations; but intelligent, thinking, conscientious christians. The law pronounces them stubborn heretics and *schismatics*. They were also of such numbers, character, and influence in society, that, as was believed, the safety of "the orthodox established religion" demanded that they should be put down by the strong arm of the General Assembly. A majority of them were undoubtedly Baptists. If they were not members actually of Baptist churches, it was because, in the providence of God, the existence of such churches, and the administration of the ordinances of the gospel, were as yet, in the colony, wholly impracticable.

Another fact, bearing directly on the point before us, is recorded by Morgan Edwards, and others. They assure us that although no churches were as yet organized there, Baptists were found in considerable numbers, scattered through the lower and northern parts of North Carolina, as early as the year 1695. These Baptists, as we learn, had gone over to that colony from contiguous portions of Virginia, to escape the intolerance of her laws. The removal of Baptists from Virginia is surely sufficient evidence that there were Baptists in Virginia.

Thus have we seen, from the state of religion in Europe, especially among the classes most likely to emigrate at the time; from the history and laws of the colony, and from the character of her people, and especially of some who emigrated hence to the contiguous colony of North Carolina; to what extent the Baptist element prevailed in Virginia, from its settlement, in 1607, to the organization of the first churches in 1714. We cannot doubt that Baptist influence was perpetually felt, and that Baptist sentiments were not unknown to the people; but that they were overborne and prevented from public organization by the severity of the laws enacted for their suppression, and the strong arm of power, under the pressure of which they perpetually labored. Those great principles, therefore, pronounced by Bancroft, "Safe in their immortality," found an asylum not alone in Rhode Island, but in the South also, where, during many years, they were silently but effectually working out the most glorious results. While, consequently, Williams was achieving "soul liberty" for America, in Providence, and Bunyan for England, in Bedford jail, there were not wanting those who, in the wilds of Virginia, were battling as best they might, for the same great cause, and under circumstances that the more loudly proclaim their steadfastness, since they had no churches to countenance, nor ministers to instruct and lead them. They stood alone, isolated, unencouraged, denounced; yet unmoved. The Bible was their only guide, and "God their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

II. What were the circumstances under which Baptist principles first became embodied in visible churches in Virginia?

Little attention has been given to this part of our history by our own writers, and the accounts of it by Pedobaptists,

from which, mainly, the reading world have derived their impressions, are singularly distorted and erroneous. Take as an example the historian of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia. This learned gentleman gravely tells his readers that the first Baptist *immigrants* to Virginia arrived in the year 1714; that *no churches* appeared until after 1765, when we had, in truth, more than *fifty*; that these churches sprang up in *Amelia county*, a part of the State where our principles *did not* at first prevail; and that their preachers came from the North, a few only having originated in the South; just the reverse of the facts.* These, and like falsifications, arise I imagine, not from any wish they may feel to misrepresent us, but simply from their indisposition to seek the necessary information. They doubtless had heard or seen some such reports, and, without examination, recorded them as verities. Whether, however, they were the result of ignorance, of carelessness, or of design, they ought long since to have been exposed and corrected. Why have they, up to this hour, remained unnoticed and unrefuted? Have we, even in our own ranks, had no friends who have cared for the honor or the memory of our fathers? Who of our Baptist writers have reviewed these Pedobaptist annalists, and turned aside the force of their disingenuous, uncandid and injurious representations? Not one. On the contrary, so far have they been from uttering rebukes, that sometimes they have shown a disposition to amuse themselves with these fables; but more frequently to repeat, as true, the ludicrous but piously told stories of men, whose knowledge of the word of God, abundant labors, and extraordinary success, and usefulness, ought to have commanded the profoundest reverence of them all. I cannot—God forbid that I ever should,—look with indifference upon the conduct, or seem in any manner to approve the spirit of those who either

* Hist. Prot. Ep. Ch. in Va., pp. 120, 121.

falsify our history or derogate from the just character and fame of our ecclesiastical fathers. I proceed to state the facts which belong to the origin of our Virginia churches.

Much is due, as to this movement, to the influence of the "Act of Toleration," defective and even oppressive as was that act in itself, passed by the English Parliament in the first year of the reign of William and Mary. The law was doubtless authoritative in the American colonies. This opinion was, however, in some quarters, warmly contested. In New York, for example, in the case of Mackamie, it was denied by the Court, and the law there declared to be inoperative. The act, upon the English Statute Book, was entitled, "An Act for exempting their Majesties' Protestant subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from penalties of certain laws. Chapter XVIII." This law, from its *terms*, could not *extend to Baptists*, either in England or America, since *Baptists are not, and never were, Protestants*. The governments, however, of both countries chose to place them in that category, and they did not think proper to object, since, if not Protestants, they were Dissenters, and needed much the indulgence of which they would thereby have been deprived. The first public acknowledgment of this law, in Virginia, was ten years after its adoption in the mother country, as part of an act entitled, "An Act for the more effectual suppressing of blasphemy, swearing, cursing, drunkenness, and Sabbath-breaking," passed in the Legislature of 1699. The association was strange, but nevertheless that in which it appeared. This act refers to the English law only in a proviso at its close, as follows: "Provided always, that if any person or persons, dissenting from the Church of England, being every way qualified, according to an act of Parliament, made in the first year of our sovereign lord the king, that now is, and the late queen, Mary, of blessed memory, entitled 'An Act for exempting their Majesties'

subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from penalties of certain laws,' shall resort and meet at any congregation or place of religious worship, permitted and allowed by the said Act of Parliament, once in two months, that then the said penalties and forfeitures imposed by the act [for Sabbath-breaking, as above, and] for refusing to resort to their parish church or chapel, as aforesaid, shall not be taken to extend to such person or persons." But it is remarkable that this "statute of William and Mary" never was placed on record in the colony. Not one person in a thousand could therefore know its contents. In the revisal of the laws of Virginia of 1705, which was the fifth, this law was introduced, in terms still more slight, in Act 30, "For the suppression of vice." It appears simply in general terms, in a parenthesis. Those interested were left to discover, if they could, to what privileges they were thereby entitled.* Beverly, in his history, and Present State of Virginia, explains the provisions of the statute in question. He says, "The people are generally of the Church of England, which is the religion established by law in the country, from which there are few dissenters. Yet liberty of conscience is given to all other congregations pretending to christianity, on condition they submit to all parish duties."† That is, they were required to pay their full proportion for the support of the parish minister of the established church; to receive marriage at his hands and in the form of the State Church; to pay all parish rates for building and repairing the meeting-houses of the established church, and for purchasing, cultivating and repairing the glebes; and when they had done this, then, if they could get a license from the authorities for a place, they might build a meeting-house on it for themselves; and if their minister could get a license to preach there, he might do

* Foote's Sketches, pp. 48, 49.

† Ed. 1705, Book 4th, Part 1st, Chap. 7, p. 27.

so; and provided they could prove that they attended his preaching once a month, they were exempt from the pains and penalties denounced against those who did not conform to the Church of England. This was toleration! This was liberty of conscience in the days of Pedobaptist rule and dominion!

The facts now submitted will explain the reasons why the people, during twenty years, knew so little of "the Act of Toleration of William and Mary," or of what the Colony would permit them to do in religion. This act did not appear upon the statute-book, and was referred to only in general terms, and in the slightest manner. Whether all this was designed, it is not my province to determine. The knowledge of the law at length reached the people, and meagre as were its provisions, they accepted them. Indeed, the dissenters were thereby greatly emboldened. They were in consequence ready and disposed, not only to express their sentiments freely, but also to carry them out into public action. They could now, as they supposed, appear in their true character, without the risk of fines, imprisonments, or banishment from the country which contained their earthly all. The first public ecclesiastical movement, by our fathers, was made by the citizens of Isle of Wight and Surry counties, on the south side of the river, opposite Jamestown. In large numbers, on an appointed day, of their own accord, having no minister to suggest it, or to lead them, they assembled to advise with each other, as to the measures proper to be adopted to supply their spiritual wants. They were not, as Dr. Hawks has told you, a company of immigrants, but the citizen yeomanry, and resident in the country. After mature deliberation, they decided to address on the subject, not their friends at the *north*, as you have been informed, but their friends in *England*. They did so immediately, earnestly soliciting that Baptist ministers might be sent among them, for their instruction and

guidance. This communication may doubtless be found among the archives of the British churches, with much other correspondence, private and official, which, if recovered, would do much to disembarass the history, not only of "The early Baptists of Virginia," but also of Baptists in all the other American colonies. Their communications were duly received by the brethren in the British metropolis. They kindly entertained their requests, and in compliance, ordained and sent to Virginia, Robert Nordin and Thomas White. This event transpired in the city of London, in May, 1714. One of these missionaries died on his passage hither; the other in due time arrived, and commenced his labors. These were soon after followed by Messrs. Jones, Mintz, and others, all of whom were received with the warmest affection, and preached, not only without molestation, but with most gratifying success. The results were the organization, during the first year of their labors, of a church at Burleigh, in Isle of Wight county, which has since taken the name of Mill Swamp; another at Brandon, in Surry, believed now to be Otterdams; and subsequently others still. Thus arose the first Baptist churches in the colony of Virginia.

While these events were transpiring in the *southern*, others of like character were taking place in the *northern* part of the Commonwealth. Numerous Baptists, previous to 1743, were resident in London, Berkeley, and contiguous counties. In compliance with their solicitation, they were visited and instructed by Messrs. Loveall, Heaton, Garrard, and other ministers, probably from the Welsh settlements in Pennsylvania. Churches, there, were soon gathered and organized: first Opecon, then Mill Creek, then Ketockton, and then still others. These, with the southern churches, solicited and obtained membership in the Philadelphia Association. From this relation they derived many and very great advantages. Especially were they favored with

the advice and assistance of that truly able body, whose ministers paid them frequent and most refreshing visits ; among whom, the labors of James Miller, David Thomas, and John Gano, can by the Virginians never be forgotten.

The laws of the colony, to which I have referred, remained unrepealed. But the impunity of our brethren was maintained by the influence of three co-operating causes. The first was found in the "Law of Toleration," before alluded to. It was presumed, that if citizens did not disturb or injure others thereby ; paid their tithes for the support of the established church, and were otherwise loyal subjects of the king ; they might be suffered generally to worship God humbly in their own way. The second was the great demoralization, at that time, of the ministry and most of the members of the State church. They rolled in wealth and luxury ; were careful only of their revenues and their pleasures ; and secure in their position, they were indifferent to the spiritual condition of the masses of the people. And the third was the spirit of liberality which had long been gaining ground in the public mind. The bigotry of the old world had failed to fix itself so indelibly upon the minds of the people of the new. They were, in truth, not much influenced by any feeling that could properly be called religious. But the grand cause was the blessing of God. "The time to favor Zion, yea, the set time had come ;" and the true principles of the gospel struck their roots irradicably into the mental soil of Virginia. Church after church noiselessly arose, like the shining out of the stars of evening, and sparkled like gems in the American firmament, which they were destined, ere long, to fill with radiance and beauty.

III. From the period at which we have now arrived, to the close of the last century, how extraordinary was the progress of our principles among the people !

Gradually, and surely, the cause had extended itself. New churches were continually springing up. The day had dawned. The rising sun was gilding all the landscape. Shubael Stearns arrived. A new era was inaugurated. Mr. Stearns was reared in Boston; was a minister of "The Established Order" of Massachusetts; had been from principle compelled to become a Baptist; had there been baptised, and ordained; and had wandered to the south, in hopes of greater usefulness. He settled with his family, at Cacapon, in Hampshire county, where with great earnestness, and many anxieties, he began to preach the gospel. Soon after his settlement, he was joined by his brother in law, Mr. Daniel Marshall, a Presbyterian minister, originally of Windsor, Connecticut, who for some years previous had been laboring voluntarily, and from a sense of duty, among the Indians, on the Susquehanna. The war now raging between them, and the Maryland colony, had destroyed his hopes of any further benefit to them, and he naturally bent his steps towards the contiguous residence of his relatives in Virginia. Meantime, Mr. Marshall also, had become a convert to our faith. He, too, was baptised, ordained as an evangelist, and entered immediately, with great zeal, upon the work of preaching the gospel of Christ. The activity, and laborious exertions of these two men of God, were in modern times wholly unprecedented. Not content with laboring in the vicinity of their residence, they visited other places, and were soon travelling, and proclaiming salvation throughout the entire length, and breadth of the colony. They found a warm co-operation on the part of the pastors. "The fields were white unto the harvest." God poured out his Holy Spirit. One universal impulse pervaded, apparently, the minds of the whole people. Evidently hungering for the bread of life, they came together in vast multitudes. Every where the ministry of these men was attended with the most

extraordinary success. Very large numbers were baptised. Churches sprang up by scores. Among the converts were many able men, who at once entered the ministry, and swelled continually the ranks of the messengers of salvation. The enthusiasm with which they all, ministers and people, engaged in this work, and the rapidity with which the gospel was transmitted from neighborhood to neighborhood, may not unfitly be described in the energetic language with which Æschylus depicts the progress of the beacon fires that announced the fall of Troy:—

“From watch to watch it leapt, that light,
As a rider rode the flame.”

The importance of some more intimate bond of union, and intercourse among themselves, through which they might more readily and effectually co-operate in their “works of faith, and labors of love,” now began to be deeply felt, by the accumulated churches in both Virginia and the Carolinas. After much consultation and prayer, the Charleston Association was formed, according to the model of the Philadelphia, the third in order of time, in the colonies. This body came into existence in 1751, and embraced churches in both the Carolinas; and in 1758 the Sandy Creek, the fourth, formed of churches in Virginia, and North, and probably South Carolina. Thus the cause was greatly accelerated. The advance of the denomination was still onward, and it was soon found that the territory of these Associations was much too large for active efficiency, and the churches too numerous to justify the hope that these bodies could call forth and effectually employ all those energies for usefulness with which God had so abundantly favored them. During the sessions, therefore, of 1770, the churches in Virginia were dismissed in a body, for that purpose, and on the second Saturday in May, 1771, at Craig’s, in Orange County, most of them, and especially

the Separate churches, were provisionally organized, and constituted, under the name of "*the General Association of Virginia*."* Thenceforward Baptists in Virginia were numbered not by hundreds, but by tens of thousands.

IV. We now inquire into the causes of the extraordinary success, with which the Baptists were favored in Virginia.

During a whole century they were vigilantly watched, and carefully kept down, by the powerful arm of the colonial government. Throughout this entire period, they conducted themselves with great circumspection, and prudence. The night of their oppression was long, and dreary. The tardy morning came at length. Like a concealed army, they sprang up from every nook, and glen, and plain, and hill, in the colony; and coming together, commenced their conquering, onward march. Their success arose, as we all know, from the blessing of God, upon his own truth, which they loved, embraced, adorned, and taught. "God is in his truth." He, sooner or later, will make it triumphant. There were, however, secondary causes; providential circumstances, and events; instrumentalities of various characters; which combined to produce this result. To these I refer more especially.

And the first I shall mention is found in the peculiar character of the people.

From the great world around them, they were almost completely isolated. Widely scattered in their deep forests, among their hills, and upon their broad plains, they acquired habits of self-reliance, which naturally extended themselves into every department of life. To preserve their families from the savage enemies that environed them, every man planned his own modes of attack, and defence. Their pecuniary, and domestic affairs, they were obliged to con-

* Semple's History of the Virginia Baptists, p. 41, et seq.

duct with little counsel from others. In a word, they were compelled, on all subjects, to think for themselves. Nor when this disposition is once formed, can it ever afterwards be repressed. It extends itself alike to temporal, and spiritual things; to the world, and to religion. They were not in circumstances to be overawed, or trammelled, by those dominant prejudices, or perverted opinions, which flow out from cities, and from rich and populous neighborhoods. With their Bibles in their hands, and little else in the form of literature; and accustomed to independent thought; they were prepared to weigh intelligently, and candidly, the teachings of our fathers. They saw that they embraced, as did those of no other denomination, truly and fully, the Gospel of Christ, as revealed in the divine word. They, therefore, gave them their cheerful and entire assent.

Another cause of their great success, may be seen in the character of the established religion of the colony.

The masses of men who read the Bible, and especially those who have become accustomed to free thought, and action, do not ordinarily relish the shackles of an established religion; and particularly are they not very hearty in the payment of heavy taxes imposed by the state, for its support; even when they cherish for that religion, and its teachers, a sincere respect. But when both have ceased to command their reverence, and others appear to them, more consonant with the word of God, it is difficult to detain them within that control which they cannot look upon but with feelings of repulsion. Precisely such a state of things now existed in Virginia. The people were tired of the bonds, and the burdens of the church. Nor was this all. With her arrogant pretensions, and her persecuting spirit, they were thoroughly disgusted. This dislike was greatly increased by the prevalent irreligion, and subsequent toryism, of her ministers, and other officers. Speaking of them,

Dr. Semple remarks:—"The loose and immoral deportment of her clergy was such, that the people were left almost destitute of even the shadow of religion. They had, indeed, some of its forms of worship, but the essential principles of christianity, were not only not understood among them, but by many never heard of."* The historian of the Episcopal Church in Virginia, quoting from Hammond, says of them:—"They could babble in a pulpit; roar in a tavern; exact from their parishioners; and rather by their dissoluteness destroy, than feed their flocks."† In another place he says:—"Many of the clergy, were unfit for their stations. The precariousness of the tenure by which they held their livings, contributed also, not a little, to beget in them a spirit of indifference in the discharge of their duties; and to complete the list of unpropitious circumstances, the irregularities and crimes of an unworthy clergyman, could not be visited effectually, with the severities of ecclesiastical censure."‡ The Legislature, therefore, attempted to remedy the evil, and the character and morals of these men may be further understood by the terms of the act of 1776, as follows:—"Be it further enacted by this Grand Assembly, and by the authority thereof, that such ministers as shall become notoriously scandalous, by drunkenness, swearing, fornication, or other heinous and crying sins, and shall be thereof lawfully convicted, shall for every such their heinous crime, and wickedness;" and the law proceeds to prescribe penalties.§ Is it surprising that for such a ministry, the best portions of the people entertained no respect whatever? The revolution at length broke out, and large numbers of "the state clergy," at once proved themselves tories; were allied with the enemies of the Commonwealth, and not a few of them fled for refuge to the bosom of the mother country. So repulsive did they

* Hist. Va. Bapt., pp. 25, 26.

† Hawks, p. 65.

‡ Ut supra, 89.

§ Hening's Stat., Vol. II., p. 384.

become on these accounts, that one at least, after preaching an offensive sermon, was taken into the woods, by a body of whigs, and soundly flogged, for his enmity to his country. Another, to avoid a similar result, carried pistols with him into the pulpit. These and others, introduced their loyalty into the very services of the Sabbath day. Nor, (I regret to record it,) do these acts of their fathers, meet the entire reprobation of their successors of the present day. The punishment of the former, the Episcopal historian calls insult and persecution; and of the latter he says:—"Such firmness was not without its effect, the resolute minister was never interrupted; his house became the asylum of many of his persecuted brethren [the tories] as one of the surest places of safety."* Apologising for them, Dr. Hawks says:—"The *clergy* were *generally* friends to the mother country." "Admit the fact," he continues, "that the view which they entertained was erroneous (as it certainly was) still it might have been, and in many cases was, a very honest error." "The question as to the proper course to be pursued, was one on which honest, and intelligent men, might easily differ." "Before, therefore, we condemn all who in the perilous struggle, took part with the mother country, we should place ourselves, in imagination, in their situation, and it may serve to temper the harshness of our judgment." "But the error was not confined to the clergy. A portion of the laity adopted their opinions. It was, however, very small, for the mass of the population in Virginia was opposed to England, and this rendered the situation of the clergy only the more disagreeable."† However good their reasons for being tories, when the people who were fighting for liberty, and shedding their blood like water, exclaiming with Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death," saw their pastors turn against them, and

* Hawk's History, &c., pp. 145, 146, 147.

† Hist. Epis. Ch. in Virginia, pp. 135, 136.

join their enemies, their indignation was natural and complete. They cast them off with contempt; and they naturally turned to the Baptists, who, to a man, stood by their country. Not one Baptist ever was known to desert the cause of freedom. Patriots and pious men, while they turned away from the parish churches with loathing, on account of their arrogance, the irreligion and the toryism of their ministers, heard the fervid discourses of our brethren, their fellow patriots, with great respect and kindness.

Still another cause of the great success of "the early Baptists of Virginia," was the measures adopted by the colonial rulers to arrest the progress of their principles.

The magistrates, in all parts of the Commonwealth, impelled and directed by the state clergy, and their more zealous friends, commenced a relentless annoyance of the people, and a heartless persecution of the ministers of our churches. Attempts were made to set aside the Toleration Act, and old and obsolete laws were hunted up, such as those to which we have referred, and essays were made to enforce their provisions. Assessments were prosecuted with new vigilance; fines were imposed and collected; meetings were disturbed and violently dispersed; and pastors, and other ministers, were arrested, dragged before the courts, brow-beaten, and ignominiously punished. All this, and more, is acknowledged by the ministers and historians of the "State Church" themselves. Dr. Hawks, for example, says, "No dissenters in Virginia experienced, for a time, harsher treatment than did the Baptists. They were beaten and imprisoned, and cruelty taxed its ingenuity to devise new modes of punishment and annoyance. The usual consequences followed. Persecution made friends for its victims; and the men who were not permitted to speak in public, found willing auditors in the sympathizing crowds, who gathered around the prisons, to hear them preach from

the grated windows. It is not improbable," he adds, "that this very opposition imparted strength in another mode, inasmuch as it at least furnished the Baptists with a common ground on which to make resistance."* In all the prisons where our brethren were incarcerated, they preached daily, from the windows, to the crowds who there assembled to hear them. This was especially true of Fredericksburg, Chesterfield Court House, Essex, Middlesex, King and Queen, Culpepper, and many other places. Rev. Eleazar Clay, a relative and the guardian of the distinguished statesman, Henry Clay, with reference to those who had there professed religion, writes thus, to the Rev. John Williams: "We wish you to come down and baptise those who are now waiting for an opportunity. The Lord is carrying on a glorious work in our county [Chesterfield]. The preaching at the prison is not attended in vain, for we hope that several are converted, while others are under great distress, and made to cry out, 'What shall we do to be saved?'"† The feelings of the people with regard to their persecutors, under these circumstances, can readily be imagined. And who were the men thus harassed and maltreated? In social position, intelligence, wealth, and general respectability, they were in no way *inferior*, and in morals and uprightness they were greatly *superior* to their assailants. Public sentiment sympathized with the Baptists, and frowned indignantly upon those supercilious officials, who, because they happened to be

"Clothed in a little brief authority,
Cut such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep."

Yet another cause of their great success, was the consonance between Baptist doctrines, on political subjects, and

* Hist. Prot. Ep. Ch. in Va., p. 121.

† Taylor's Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers, pp. 203, 204.

the spirit of liberty which had now taken entire possession of the hearts of the people.

Complete separation of church and state ; perfect freedom of conscience and worship ; and the right of every citizen to full and equal protection by the government in the exercise of all his privileges, social, political and religious ; were sentiments held, maintained, and constantly advocated by Baptists, and by no other denomination in the colony. By Episcopalians, Methodists, and, to a great extent, by Presbyterians, these principles were denounced as pestilential heresies, to be deplored, and if possible, destroyed. To their value and importance, the progress of events had opened the eyes of the people. They saw plainly, the great truth, that no state that does not fully embrace them, ever can be really free. The time of their triumph had now come. Our ministers, and people, proclaimed them boldly. The masses received them everywhere with delight. By thousands, therefore, they ranged themselves on the side of the Baptists.

The great success of our doctrines was however due, under God, still more to the peculiar character of *the preaching* of the times.

Never was there a *ministry* more perfectly adapted to the people of that age, and to the times in which they lived, and labored ; and never was there a population more ready to receive and obey the truth. Nor was their work seriously retarded, at any time, by controversies among themselves ; all that has been said on this subject, by our assailants, and even our friends, to the contrary notwithstanding. They were not free from discussions on what are known in modern times as Calvinism and Arminianism ; subjects on which the best and most learned men, in no age of the Church, have ever been able perfectly to harmonize. Episcopacy also, from which, as seen in the established church,

so many of them had withdrawn themselves, still lingered in the ranks of "The Early Baptists of Virginia." Their judgments had been beclouded by its teachings, to which they had listened from their childhood, and did not at once, see the simple and beautiful polity of the church, as taught by Christ, and his apostles. Upon this subject also, for a season, they were warmly agitated. But all their differences were discussed with a prayerfulness, christian courtesy, and brotherly love, unknown to any other Christians of that age, and therefore soon resulted, as we shall hereafter see more fully, in a harmony as complete perhaps, as any of which imperfect human nature is capable. Never has there been a church existing through so many centuries, and of numbers so great, which has preserved a more perfect union than the Baptists. Especially, never has there been a more harmonious church, than that of "The Early Baptists of Virginia."* All this must be at once apparent to every intelligent man who, without prejudice, reads the ecclesiastical history of Virginia for the last century.

The ministry of that period, were generally received from the masses to whom they preached, and with whose character, circumstances and peculiarities they were intimately acquainted. And nearly every discourse, however learned, or unlearned the preacher, was constructed upon very much the same model. With great clearness, and simplicity, they first presented the lost condition of man by nature; the depravity of the human heart; and the impossibility of deliverance by the law, or by any acts of obedience, ordinances, or works of merit whatever. They next depicted vividly, the way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, with its gracious characteristics, bearings and relations. An explanation followed, of the manner in which that sal-

* I employ here the word church, not with strict scriptural propriety, but in accordance with the usages of the times.

vation is personally applied, by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer, accompanied always by repentance towards God and faith in the Redeemer. They now recounted the mental phenomena attendant upon true spiritual regeneration, with the temptations, trials, and encouragements, characteristic of genuine christian experience. They closed by an earnest appeal to Christians, suitably to adorn their holy profession, and to sinners to accept this great salvation. Every sermon they uttered, went directly to the heart. Multitudes heard, believed, obeyed, and rejoiced.

These, mainly, were the causes which gave to "The Early Baptists of Virginia" their extraordinary success.

V. We now consider the controversies that prevailed among "The Early Baptists of Virginia," and the harmony, doctrinal and practical, at which they at length arrived.

On two topics only, of any special importance, were they not agreed. These were, as already stated, the doctrines of predestination, and of episcopacy; and both they may, in some sense, be said to have inherited from their fathers of a former period. To these we will now refer, in the order in which they have been named.

The doctrines subsequently known in ecclesiastical history, as Calvinism and Arminianism, attracted no special attention until the days of Augustine, whose contests with Pelagius brought them forward. After his times, they were confined very much to the schools. Baptists were not agitated with these questions, until the reformation under Luther occurred. Soon afterwards, however, they were often discussed by our brethren, and ultimately divided them into two parties; the one assuming Arminian ground, and known as General Baptists; and the other maintaining Calvinistic ground, and known as Particular Baptists. To-

gether these two classes have always formed one of the largest bodies of English dissenters, and have counted among their number, many of the most distinguished men England has ever produced. To say nothing of their laymen, such as Harrison, Ludlow, Lilburn, Penn, DeLaune, and others, their list of ministers was most brilliant. The names of Bunyan, Tombes, Bampfield, Gosnold, Knollys, Denne, Cox, Jesse, Du Veil, Dell, Smyth, Helwisse, Barbour, Grantham, Russell, Gale, Emlyn, Whiston, Foster, Toulmin, Kiffin, Steed, Vaux, the Collins', Lamb, Price, Keats, Harris, Sutton, Adams, Mann, the Stennetts, Piggott, Stinton, Gill and Gifford—not to mention multitudes of others—would give fame to any denomination of Christians, in any age of the world.* Had these great men “agreed to disagree” on the subject of predestination, and their people have mingled freely together, their differences would soon have been forgotten. Unhappily they did not, and they were perpetuated as two distinct denominations.

The Baptist immigrants to America came from both these classes, and for a season associated with each other, in this country, indiscriminately. When, however, Baptist principles began to flourish in Virginia, and churches to be multiplied, their hereditary differences again came up, and soon they separated from each other, and General Baptist churches and ministers, and Particular Baptist churches and ministers, were scattered alternately throughout the whole land. For some cause, however, not now readily ascertained, they assumed here new names. In Virginia they were not, as in England, General and Particular, but Separate and Regular Baptists; but their doctrines were the same as before. Anterior to the formation of the General Association, essays had been made for a union between these two parties, which were conducted with

* Benedict's History of the Baptists, edition 1848, pp. 220, et seq.

great kindness, but which were not entirely successful. They were forwarded earnestly, by brethren on both sides. The first movement in this direction was made in 1767. In 1769, the *Separate* Baptist Association, the Sandy Creek, held in North Carolina, was addressed by the Ketockton, a *Regular* Baptist Association in northern Virginia, as follows:

“Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ:—The bearers of this letter [they were Rev. Messrs. Garret, Mager and Saunders] can acquaint you with the design of writing it. Their errand is peace, and their business is a reconciliation between us, if there is any difference subsisting. If we are all Christians; all Baptists; all New Lights [a recent name of reproach], why are we divided? Must the little appellative names, Regular and Separate, break the golden band of charity, and set the sons and daughters of Zion at variance? ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’ But how bad and how bitter it is, for them to live asunder in discord! To indulge ourselves in prejudice, is surely disorder; and to quarrel about nothing, is irregularity with a witness. O, dear brethren, endeavor to prevent this calamity for the future.”

The subject was long discussed, and a union only prevented at that time, by an apparent necessity of settling with more deliberation some of its details. This, as it appears, was the last session of the Sandy Creek Association. The body met again the next year, but only to arrange for separating into *three kindred bodies*: the churches in South Carolina to meet and organize at Saluda, in that State; in North Carolina, at Haw River, for the same purpose; and in Virginia, to meet at Thompson’s, in Louisa county, where the *General Association* was finally formed;* after a preliminary meeting at Craig’s, in Orange county, held

*_Sample’s History, pp. 45–47.

in May of the same year to which we have before referred. Thus, for a season, the desired union was, as appears, providentially postponed.

Happily, churches and ministers of *both parties* were found, in the beginning, occupying places in the General Association. The first intimation of a continued desire for the establishment of a union, more formally and perfectly, appeared in the proceedings of that body during the session of 1773, in the appointment of a delegation, consisting of Rev. Messrs. Samuel Harris, E. Craig, John Waller, and David Thompson, to visit and confer with the Kehukee Association, then occupying parts of lower Virginia and North Carolina.* In 1774, the subject again came up, on a "Question concerning a Confession of Faith." Such a paper was decided to be proper for Churches, rather than Associations.† The session of 1775 was rendered unhappy by a discussion and defence, not of the union proposed, but of the points of difference between the General and Particular Baptists. Samuel Harris, Jeremiah Walker, John Waller, and others, defended the principles of the former; and those of the latter were sustained by William Murphy, John Williams, E. Craig, and others.‡ The discussions, conducted with great ability, candor and Christian courtesy, were continued throughout the whole of Monday. At the close of the day, a decision was made, in which it was found that, by a very small majority, the sentiment of the body was adverse to the Arminian opinion. After this decision, the friends of General Baptist principles, consulting together, determined again to bring up the subject the next day, upon the question, whether their opinions would be made, by their brethren on the other side, "A bar to fellowship and communion." When they met on Tuesday,

* Ut supra, p. 45.

† Idem, p. 57.

‡ Pamphlets were written on the subject, by some of these gentlemen, which I have not seen.

the two parties assembled separately. Their communications were all by messages, either verbal or written. The scene was painful in the highest degree. Ultimately the Arminian party addressed the other as follows:

“Dear brethren,—A steady union with you makes us willing to be more explicit in our answer to your terms of reconciliation proposed. We do not deny the former part of your proposition, respecting particular election of grace, still retaining our liberty with regard to construction. And as to the latter part, respecting merit in the creature, we are free to profess that there is none.”

To this very gratifying communication, the Predestinarians responded thus:

“Dear brethren,—Inasmuch as your christian fellowship seems nearly as dear to us as our lives, and seeing our difficulties concerning your principles with respect to merit in the creature, particular election, and final perseverance of the saints, are in a hopeful measure removing, we do willingly retain you in fellowship, not raising the least bar; but do heartily wish and pray that God, in his kind providence, in his own time, may bring it about, when Israel shall all be of one mind, speaking the same things.”

The work was now done. The parties came joyfully together. Delight was in every heart. The Association resumed and finished its business. Their reunion was as happy as their conflict had been distressing.*

On the dissolution of the General Association, in 1783, the subject of union again came up, on a renewed proposition to adopt a Declaration of Faith. The brethren present fixed upon the one adopted at Philadelphia, with various modifications, especially with respect to the necessity that all should embrace its teachings in every particular. They were careful that this symbol should “Not usurp a tyrannical power over the consciences of any.” They said

* Semple's History, pp. 60, 61.

and recorded the decision: "We do not mean that every person is to be bound to the strict observance of every thing therein contained, nor do we mean to make it, in any respect, superior or equal to the Scriptures in matters of faith and practice." All we propose is, to express the opinion that it is "The best human composition of the kind now extant, yet it shall be liable to alterations whenever the General Committee, in behalf of the Associations, shall think fit."*

The relations of brethren and churches, on both sides, continued to be more and more intimate and affectionate. The desire for a perfect union had become ardent and universal. In the session of the General Committee of 1786, the following proceeding was passed unanimously: "It is recommended to the different Associations, to appoint delegates to attend the next General Committee, for the purpose of forming a union."† The Committee assembled in annual session at Dover, in Goochland county, August 10th, 1787. All the Associations in the State were fully represented. The record of proceedings, as stated by Semple, is as follows: "Agreeably to appointment, the subject of the union of Regular [Particular] and Separate [General] Baptists, was taken up, and a happy and effectual reconciliation was accomplished. The objections on the part of the Separates related chiefly to matters of trivial importance, and had been for some time removed. On the other hand, the Regulars complained that the Separates were not sufficiently explicit in their principles, having never published or sanctioned a Confession of Faith. To these things it was answered, by the Separates, that a large majority of them believed as much in their Confession of Faith as they did themselves, although they did not entirely approve of the practice of religious societies binding themselves too strictly by Confessions of Faith, seeing

* Semple's History, pp. 59, 60.

† Semple's History, p. 73.

there was danger of their finally usurping too high a place ; that if there were among them some who leaned too much towards the Arminian system, they were generally men of exemplary piety, and great usefulness in the Redeemer's kingdom ; and they conceived it better to bear with some diversity of opinions in doctrines, than to break with men whose christian deportment rendered them amiable in the estimation of all true lovers of genuine godliness. Indeed that some of them had now become fathers in the gospel, who previous to the bias which their minds had received, had borne the brunt and heat of persecution ; whose labors, and sufferings God had blessed, and still blessed, to the great advancement of his cause ; and that to exclude such as these from their communion, would be like tearing the limbs from the body. These, and such like arguments, were agitated both in public, and in private, so that all minds were much mollified before the final, and successful attempt for union. The terms of the union were entered upon the minutes. They were a general recognition of the principles set forth in the Confession of Faith, previously adopted, with limitations and explanations, by the General Association. After considerable debate, as to the propriety of having any Confession of Faith at all, the report of the Committee was adopted, with the following explanation : "To prevent the Confession of Faith from usurping a tyrannical power over the consciences of any, we [repeat that] we do not mean [by its adoption] that every person is bound to the strict observance of everything therein contained, yet that it holds forth the essential truths of the gospel, and [shows] that the doctrine of salvation by Christ, and free and unmerited grace alone, ought to be believed by every christian, and maintained by every minister of the gospel. Upon these terms we are united, and desire that hereafter the names, *Regular* and *Separate*, be buried in oblivion ; and that from henceforth we shall

be known by the name of ‘*The United Baptist Churches of Christ, in Virginia.*’”* These proceedings were conducted in the most cordial, and admirable spirit. They filled with joy those who were present, and were, by all the churches, hailed and ratified with delight. All party feeling was instantly banished, and never has any one denomination been more harmonious than continued to be all The Early Baptists of Virginia.

The other subject of controversy among our fathers, was substantially, the doctrine of Episcopacy. This, also, I have said, they inherited from their fathers. It came from two sources. The former was the English General Baptists, among whom it existed, at one time, for a century or more, but not in the diocesan form which it assumed in Virginia. “Ever attentive,” says Taylor, “to Scripture precedents, it was not long before they supposed that they discovered, in the primitive churches, an officer superior to an Elder. They remarked that Barnabas, Luke, Timothy, Titus, and several others, were fellow-laborers with the apostles, in the preaching of the gospel, and the planting and regulating of churches; and that, in various passages, they were called apostles, or, in English, *messengers* of the churches. They thought it probable that the Angels, or Messengers, of the seven churches in Asia, to whom the author of the Revelations addressed his epistles, were also of the same order. They therefore introduced an officer into their system, whom they styled a *Messenger*. He was generally chosen by an Association of the representatives of the churches in a certain district, and ordained by those of his own order, with great solemnity, the various churches keeping seasons of prayer and fasting. Sometimes a particular church chose a Messenger; but in that case his business appears to have been confined to preaching the gospel where it was not known, and regulating such churches as he might be

* Hist. Va. Bapt., pp. 74, 75.

instrumental in planting. It is indeed probable, that, at the first, this was the chief object of their appointment; an object which demanded peculiar attention when the nation was just emerging from the darkness of Popery, and Prelacy, and the rays of divine truth had hardly pierced the gloom. Fixed pastors could not conveniently itinerate in distant parts; and it would have been thought irregular for unauthorized persons to have undertaken it; but the Messengers stood ready for this necessary work, and their office called them to it." "They were appointed," says Jeffrey, "for the gathering of churches, and the establishment of them. But when churches increased, and errors, and irregularities sprung up among the young converts, and inexperienced ministers, it was judged expedient to extend the Messengers' work, by assigning to him the superintendence and, in a sense, the government of those churches which united in calling him to the office."

The duties of these officers are thus described in the Confession of 1678:—"The Bishops have the government of those churches that had suffrage in their election, and no others ordinarily; as also to preach the word to the world." Mr. Grantham says, "their ministry is, 1, to plant churches where there are none; 2, to set in order such churches as want officers to order their affairs; 3, to assist faithful pastors, or churches against usurpers, and those that trouble the peace of particular churches by false doctrine." Hook says that their duty was "to plant churches, ordain officers, set in order things that were wanting in all the churches, to defend the gospel against gainsayers, and to travel up and down the world for this purpose."*

Virginia Baptist Episcopacy was, however, derived, to a still greater extent, from another source. Great numbers of the Baptists of that day were reared in the Episcopal church. The impressions of childhood are hard to efface.

* Benedict's Hist., pp. 332, 333.

They had practically, and experimentally, learned the way of the Lord more perfectly, but ecclesiastical polity they had not studied. The arguments in favor of the hierarchy they had been accustomed to admit as scriptural; and now that the love of Christ was shed abroad in their hearts, they were most anxious to do all which appeared to them to be the will of the Lord. The subject was first introduced into the General Association, at its session in 1774, by the following query:—"Ought all the ministerial gifts, recorded in Ephesians iv., 11, 12, 13, to be in use in the present time?" The passage in question reads, it will be remembered, as follows:—"And he gave [in the Church] some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers;—for the perfecting of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ;—till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." After considerable discussion, it was answered: "A great majority suppose that all the ministerial gifts recorded in the said scriptures are, and ought to be, still in use in the churches; although we pay due regard to the distinction between ordinary, and extraordinary gifts."*

By this action the friends of episcopacy had obtained a recognition of the principle. Their purpose now, was to carry this principle out into practice, at as early a day as possible. Nothing, however, could be done until the meeting of the next year, when, to bring it up, they again proposed the same inquiry to the General Association. "After two days' debate," says Dr. Semple, "a majority decided that it ought to be put off until the next Association."† Meantime, warm discussions were every where carried on, whether it was not their duty to originate and ordain

* Semple's Hist. Va. Bapt., p. 56.

† Hist. Va. Bap., p. 57.

Apostles of the churches. Jeremiah Walker, who first brought forward the question, was its ablest advocate. He wrote a pamphlet in its defence, entitled "Free Thoughts," in which he employed most of the arguments commonly adduced in support of Episcopacy, by those who maintain that form of ecclesiastical polity, and with which you, gentlemen, are perfectly familiar. The strongest opponent of the measure was Reuben Ford, who, in a pamphlet of much ability, answered the arguments of Mr. Walker. The Association convened, and the discussion commenced, during which both these pamphlets were read.* The question was at length taken, whether "the said offices are now in use in Christ's church?" Three only voted in the negative, all of whom immediately declared their submission to the majority, and the vote was recorded as unanimous. It was then decided "that the said offices be immediately established, by the appointment of certain persons to fill them." The action of the body shows, however, that reference was had exclusively to the apostleship, which, according to the reasoning of all prelatists, is perpetuated in the office of Bishops, which name, however, they chose not to introduce. The Association now proceeded to elect an *Apostle*, which they did by private ballot, and *Samuel Harris* was unanimously chosen. The next day was observed by the whole Association as a solemn fast. The brethren met, and proceeded with the ordination. Prayer was offered successively by John Waller, Elijah Craig, and John Williams; the hands of every ordained minister present were laid upon him; a solemn charge was addressed to him by John Waller; and the formalities closed with the right hand of fellowship extended by the whole Association. All that part of Virginia south of James river was fixed as his diocese; and he went forth

* Can these pamphlets, and those written by our brethren on the Arminian Controversy, now be obtained?

commended to the grace of God, by his brethren. Thus was inaugurated the first Baptist Bishop in America, and the first Baptist Diocesan Bishop the world ever saw.

But, unhappily, he was not the last. In the autumn of the same year another meeting of the Association was held, and to officiate in that part of the state *north of James river*, with like forms and observances, *John Waller* and *Elijah Craig* were solemnly elected, and ordained as Apostles. The duties assigned these apostles were "To pervade the churches ; to do, or at least see to, the work of ordination ; and to set in order things that were wanting ; and to make report to the next Association." As a rule of discipline applicable to them, the following was recorded :—" If our *Messenger* or *Apostle* shall transgress in any manner, he shall be liable to dealing, in any church where the transgression is committed ; and the said church is instructed to call helps from two or three neighboring churches, and if by them, found a transgressor, a General Conference of the churches shall be called to excommunicate, or to restore him."*

We now behold The Early Baptists of Virginia occupying a new position. They are prelatists, and under the guidance of *three Apostles, or Diocesan Bishops*. They all went forth, in this form, to their work. The churches and brethren generally, had never, it seems, been entirely satisfied as to the correctness of this radical change in their polity. It was not, therefore, tacitly accepted. Discussions and animadversions were renewed, and continued. They were no longer confined to their annual meetings. The whole subject, though now almost too late, was at length thoroughly studied. A change in the public mind, was soon apparent. Our brethren learned that Episcopacy is derived wholly from the old temple service, under the dispensation of Moses, as Presbytery is from the synagogue

* Semple's Hist. Vir. Baptists, pp. 58, 59.

system that prevailed in the later ages of the Hebrew commonwealth; that therefore, they are both forms of Judaism, which the christian church cannot adopt without a departure from the law of Christ, and, consequently, irreparable injury; that all christians are now priests, and Christ the only High Priest; and that priesthood in any sense not common to christians generally, does not enter at all into the gospel ministry; that the Apostles, as soon as they had planted churches, appointed for them pastors and teachers, who were their substitutes in all respects, except those in which they were invested with a peculiar and extraordinary commission; that the Apostles were appointed especially as a jury of witnesses, to bear testimony to the ministry, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; that in those primary respects, when they died, their office died with them; that the Apostles were divinely inspired to reveal and communicate truths not before known, which are recorded in the New Testament, and when that book was finished, there could be no more apostles; that from the very nature of the office, they could have had no official successors; that the persons appointed by the Apostles to fill their places, as far as they could be filled, were the first christian pastors, evangelists and teachers, and that the churches once organized, then by the instructions of the Apostles, each church did for itself, and others, what in the beginning the Apostles must necessarily do for them; and that when the original twelve passed away, there were no more apostles; not only because the thing was impossible in itself, but because there could be no further use for the office. They concluded, therefore, that this whole proceeding was entirely unauthorized by the word of God, and were, consequently, not prepared to receive the apostolic services of their lately appointed brethren. These, and like considerations, were the more effective, because none of those brethren whose great personal influence, and extra-

ordinary eloquence, had carried the measure, and who probably were themselves ambitious of the distinction, were chosen. They, therefore, retired from the discussion, and left the public mind to the full force of these counter arguments. Nor were the apostles themselves very confident that their office was now fully justified by the divine word. Naked episcopacy was, for reasons sufficiently apparent, especially unpopular. On this account, no doubt, it had been advocated, and carried among the Baptists, under the name of apostleship. This fact now became known, and had, doubtless, its effect upon the public mind. Under these circumstances the General Association assembled the next year. The *apostles* reported in *desponding terms*, and *ceased to act in that capacity*. The whole plan fell into a state of dissuetude. Without any rescinding action, or other adverse movement, the episcopacy, as if by common consent, was tacitly *abandoned*. At a subsequent session the subject was called up, and after consideration, it was decided, and entered on record, "That the office of apostles, like that of prophets, was the effect of miraculous inspiration, and does not belong to ordinary times." In this decision there was a unanimous concurrence, and we hear no more of the episcopacy of the early Baptists of Virginia.*

These two, we have seen, were the only subjects of any importance in which our Virginia fathers were engaged in controversy among themselves. Upon both they at length harmonised perfectly. Regular, and Separate Baptists, as such, were known no more. All were United Baptists. Apostleship as an office in our churches, ceased to be remembered, except as a vagary into which they had at one period, for a short time, strangely, most unaccountably fallen. To bring to pass these results several

* Semple's Hist., p. 59.

powerful causes were in operation, to some of which we may barely allude.

The first cause, beyond the peculiar favor and blessing of God, of the perfect union at which all our fathers arrived, and I name it first, because it is the most important of them all, was the ardent christian feeling by which, as a whole, they were always actuated. They were almost perpetually in a state of revival. Brotherly love burned in their hearts. No jealousies, or antagonism, existed among them. "Each esteemed other better than himself." They sought only the triumph of truth, the glory of God, and the salvation of men. It was not difficult, therefore, for them to harmonize on any subject connected with the religion of Christ.

Another cause was the indiscriminate persecutions waged against them by the state church. They all suffered together, and as Baptists. Whether General, or Particular, or as the same parties came to be called here, Separate or Regular Baptists, or whether the advocates, or the opponents of the episcopacy, which they chose to denominate apostleship, made no difference. They found themselves together before the courts, in the jails, and in the hands of the officers of the law. As fellow sufferers for Christ, they became personally, strongly endeared to each other. To these facts you will have observed constant references were made in their negotiations. They prompted that affecting remark contained in one of their official communications, before noticed, in which one party says to the other, in answer to an earnest overture for union, "Your christian fellowship seems nearly as dear to us as our lives."* Nothing is more natural than that such men under such circumstances, whatever their original differences, should arrive at a harmony as complete as any of which human beings are capable.

* Semple's Hist., p. 61.

Another, and the last cause which I shall mention, of the happy termination of their controversies, was the necessity of concentrating all their strength to resist successfully, the injuries sought to be inflicted upon them by their common persecutors, and to gain the ends they proposed, with respect to the government of the state, of which I shall presently more fully speak. What in these respects could they hope to accomplish if divided, and in conflict among themselves? They spurned such petty warfare, and generously united their forces, sacrificing however, no principle, for none was really involved, and became one harmonious and gallant army, opposing to their adversaries an unbroken front. The close of the last century saw all the Baptists of Virginia in harmony, prosperity and happiness.

VI. We now proceed to consider the influence of the Baptists in the formation of the government of the state.

“The share which the Baptists took in shoring up the fallen liberties of England, and in infusing new vigor, and liberality into the constitution of that country,” says Dr. Williams, speaking of the times of Cromwell, and the events of that period, “is not generally acknowledged. It is scarcely even known. The dominant party in the church and in the state, at the restoration, became the historians. And when the man, and not the lion, was the painter, it was easy to foretell with what party all the virtues, all the talents, and all the triumphs would be found. When our principles shall have won their way to a more general acceptance, the share of the Baptists in the achievements of that day will be disinterred, like many other forgotten truths, from the ruins of history. Then it will, we believe, be found that while dross, such as has alloyed the purest churches in the best ages, may have existed in our denomination, yet the body was composed of pure and scriptural christians, who contended manfully, with some bitter suffer-

ings, for the rights of conscience, and the truth as it is in Jesus; that to them English liberty owes a debt it can never acknowledge; and that amongst them christian freedom found its earliest, and some of its staunchest, its most consistent, and its most disinterested champions.”* These statements are eminently applicable to Virginia. The Baptists in this colony were distinguished for their patriotism. They were ever ready to “Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.” But they had suffered too much not to be equally ready to resist Cæsar, when he attempted to usurp “the things that are God’s.” An opportunity now occurred in which there was a probability that their political doctrines might be incorporated into the civil government. Manfully did they essay the achievement, and most glorious was their success. With the assistance of some portions, and on some points, of the Presbyterian church, they overthrew the state establishment, not as a church, for this they did not desire to do, but as an engine of the government; they severed Episcopacy from the civil power, and left it, and its ministry, to stand upon their own merits; they resisted successfully, the incorporation of any denomination of Christians as such, and they defeated all those measures by which it was sought to tax the people for the support of the ministers of religion, in connection with any of the Churches of the Colony; and severing the unholy union between Church and State, they gave to the commonwealth, full religious liberty. These, I am aware, are bold declarations. By many, they may be deemed wholly untenable. Indulge me, therefore, gentlemen, while I justify them all, by a brief statement of the facts in the case.

The Early Baptists of Virginia, did not form their purposes with relation to the government, carelessly, nor hastily. They were the result of mature thought, protracted

* Benedict’s History of the Baptists, edition 1843, p. 322.

consultation, and most earnest prayer. Nor were their measures sudden, or rash. They spurned rebellion, and all revolutionary, or violent action. They did not contemplate for themselves, honor, or place, or power. Their appeal was to the legally constituted authorities, and they asked only for their just rights as men, as citizens, and as christians. These they never abandoned, but sought with resistless energy and perseverance. I speak not now of the separate individual action of the citizens, many thousands of whom, in every department of society, civil and military, were communicants in our churches. These all, since at that time, every man was a politician, exerted each in his sphere, a direct influence over the governing power. I confine myself to a statement of their organised and systematic action as a denomination. To those who have any competent knowledge of the history of the times, it is well known that the General Association of Virginia, afterwards the General Committee, and finally, the General Meeting of Correspondence, entered fully into all the political questions of the times, especially those having any direct bearing upon their civil, or religious liberty. They were regularly brought before them, carefully considered, freely discussed, and their decisions recorded. These bodies, as we shall see, spread themselves over the whole formative period of the government, during all which time, they had by annual appointment, as circumstances seemed to demand, from one to five commissioners, in attendance upon the meetings of the Convention, and upon every session of the State Legislature. Of their proceedings, our limits will permit us to present but very brief sketches.

The General Association of Virginia, of that period, was an organization altogether different from that of the present day. On this subject, however, you, gentlemen, need no special information beyond what has already been given in our general and incidental references to the subject. During

the first three years of its existence, the only references to the political condition of the country, contained in the imperfect records of their proceedings that remain, had regard to the violent persecutions then waged against Baptists by the Colonial Government. Measures were taken to assist their imprisoned and suffering brethren; days of fasting and prayer were appointed, and devoutly observed; and special supplications were solicited and constantly offered in behalf of their "poor blind persecutors," and, that God would graciously grant his people "a happy issue out of all their troubles." Meantime the controversy of the Colonies with the mother country, which had so long been pending, became deeper, and more intense. Virginia was now heaving like a volcano, whose pent up fires, it was evident, could not much longer be restrained.

Under these circumstances, the General Association met at the Dover Church, in Manokin Town, the fourth Saturday in May, 1775. Sixty churches were present by their messengers. Their interview was characterized by long, and earnest consultations, as to the measures proper for them to adopt. Such men were present as Harris, Metcalf, Lovell, Hargitt, Maneese, Chastaine, Johnston, Walker, Ellington, Williams, Childs, Thompson, Trebble, Waller, Burruss, Ford, Webber, the Craigs, Bledsoe, Card, Twyman, Bennett, Eve, Munroe, Peyton, Holtsclaugh, Withers, Marshall and Pickett. They determined to address the State Convention soon to be assembled, to consider the condition of the country generally, and of Virginia particularly. They decided that the memorial should be carefully prepared, and to give time for this purpose, they adjourned for three months, and met again with the Church at Du Puy's, in Cumberland, now Powhattan county, on the second Saturday in August of that year. These sessions, as subsequent events have shown, were among the most important ever held by any Christian people, since the days of the Apostles.

In reference to them, Dr. Semple remarks: "The discontents in America, arising from British oppression, were drawing to a crisis." "This was a very favorable season for the Baptists. Having been much ground under British laws." "They were to a man, favorable to any revolution by which they could obtain freedom of religion."*

The memorial was presented, considered, and adopted. It contemplated two objects; the freedom of the Colony from British rule, and the freedom of religion among the people of the Colony. The former of these objects is thus noticed in the Journals of the Convention. "An address from the Baptists of this Colony was presented to the Convention and read, setting forth that, however distinguished from their countrymen by appellations and sentiments of a religious nature, they nevertheless consider themselves as members of the same community, in respect to matters of a civil nature, and embarked in the same common cause; that alarmed at the oppression which hangs over America, they had considered what part it would be proper for them to take in the unhappy contest, and had determined that in some cases, it is lawful to go to war; and, *that we ought to make a military resistance to Great Britain*, in her unjust invasion, tyrannical oppression, and repeated hostilities;† that their brethren had liberty at discretion, to enlist, without incurring the censure of their religious community; and under the circumstances many had enlisted as soldiers, and that many more were ready to join the army;" that their ministers would encourage their young men to enter the service of their country, and desired for themselves, permission to serve the army in the capacity of Chaplains.‡ This was the Convention which instructed our delegates in Congress, to declare independence, an act upon which Virginia

* History of Virginia Baptists, p. 62.

† It will be remembered that Lord Dunmore was then desolating the coast of Virginia.

‡ Journals, p. 17.

patriotism has always so much prided itself. To what extent that body was moved by the Baptists, to give this instruction, I leave to be decided by every man for himself. If that action was honorable to the Convention, it was still more honorable to the Baptists, who were prior to them in the movement, and who boldly urged it as a duty upon their attention.

The second object contemplated in this address was "*Religious freedom*" for the people. To this end they drew up, and embodied in their memorial, a formal "Declaration of principles in relation to civil government; the most striking features of which were as follows:—"We hold that the mere toleration of religion by the civil government, is not sufficient; that no State religious establishment ought to exist; that all religious denominations ought to stand upon the same footing; and, that to all alike the protection of the government should be extended, securing to them the peaceable enjoyment of their own religious principles and modes of worship.*

Not to speak further of the patriotic movements of our Fathers, with regard to the freedom of the country from political vassalage, let us consider what they proposed for the cause of Christ. They sought,

1. That religion should be free absolutely, in its doctrine, and ordinances, from any restraint whatever, exercised by the civil power.
2. That the State religious establishment should be discontinued, and as such, exist no more.
3. That no favor should be shown by the State to one religious denomination more than to another.
4. That all should receive alike, the protection of the civil government.

Their reasons for these principles, they presented in a subsequent paper, to the Legislature. In that paper they

* Semple's History of Virginia Baptists, p. 62.

said :—" We hold it for a fundamental and unalienable truth, that the religion of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man ; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is, in its nature, an inalienable right. It is inalienable, because what is here a right towards man, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator, such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and degree of obligation, to the claims of civil society. Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe. And if a member of civil society, who enters into any subordinate association, must always do it with a reservation of his duty to the general authority, much more must every man who becomes a member of any particular civil society, do it with a saving of his allegiance to the Universal Sovereign. We maintain, therefore, that in matters of religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of civil society ; and that religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance." " If religion be exempt from the authority of the society at large, still less can it be subject to that of the legislative body. The latter are but the creatures, and vice-gerents of the former. Their jurisdiction is both derivative, and limited. [It is derived from the will of the people they represent.] It is limited [by the extent of the authority conferred. It is limited] with regard to the co-ordinate departments. More necessarily it is limited with regard to the constituents. The [creation, and] preservation of a free government requires, not merely that the metes, and bounds, which separate each department of power, be invariably maintained, but more especially that neither of them be suffered to overleap the great barrier which defends the rights of the people. The rulers who are guilty of such an encroachment, exceed the commission

from which they derive their authority, and are tyrants. The people who submit to it, are governed by laws made neither by themselves, nor by any authority derived from them, and are slaves." "If 'all men are by nature, equally free, and independent,'* all men are to be considered as entering into society on equal conditions; as relinquishing no more, and therefore retaining no less, one than another, of their natural rights; above all are they to be considered as retaining an equal title to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience. Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and to observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us. If this freedom be abused, it is an offence against God, not against man. To God, therefore, and not to man, must an account be rendered." An established religion "implies either that the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truths, or that he may employ religion as an engine of civil polity. The first is an arrogant pretension, falsified by the extravagant opinions of rulers in all ages, and throughout the world; the second, an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation.†

These principles, were at that time, and had been for a thousand years, as all who have read history must know, denounced by all other denominations, as the rankest heresy, both religious and political. None in the Old World but Baptists, had ever ventured to avow them, and there they paid with their lives for their presumptuous daring. In the New World, no where but in Baptist Rhode Island, had they been adopted. Boldly did our brethren assume their grounds, and ably did they maintain them. Our brethren of other churches, anxious as they now are to share in the honors of these measures, were then, whatever

* Declaration of Rights, Article 1.

† Semple, p. 435, et. seq.

might have been their private thoughts, especially prudent. The Presbyterians were at that time, a small but influential denomination in Virginia. As early as 1740, they began their settlements. And their churches were composed mostly of Scotch and Irish people, and their descendants. They were located at first, mostly "among the hills, and on the western side of the Blue Ridge." At this time, however, they were found in nearly all the counties of the Colony. The Hanover Presbytery, which had its name from that of the county in which their most distinguished minister, Mr. Davies, resided, had for two years previously, petitioned the Colonial Legislature; but their addresses were indefinite, having regard mainly, to their desire to be delivered from Episcopal predominance and rule. The conflict then commencing with Great Britain, was to their mind of dubious result. They unhappily appeared at least, unwilling to assume a position, from which, should we fail to achieve our liberties, they might not be able readily to recede. For these, then startling doctrines, declarations, purposes, all, whether they involved honor or dishonor, deliverance or chains, life or death, *the Baptists, and the Baptists alone, were then held by others, and held themselves responsible.*

Their memorial setting forth these principles, manifesting their justice, and urging their adoption, was placed in the hands of Rev. Messrs Jeremiah Walker, John Williams, and George Roberts, who were appointed to attend the meeting of the Convention, remain at the Capitol, mingle, and converse with the members, and to employ every honorable means to procure the ends proposed. And most faithfully did these gentlemen perform the duty assigned them. With three leading members of the Convention they formed an immediate acquaintance, all of whom, except the last, entered fully into their spirit. This acquaintance, which led the gentlemen in question to co-operate with our

churches, and people, resulted in the happiest consequences. To the end they stood by our fathers in every measure they brought forward. They were Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Patrick Henry. Under these auspices, their memorial was presented to the Convention. The ceremonial was imposing, and the reading produced a most extraordinary, and instant effect. An impression was made which could not be effaced. On the contrary, it continued to deepen, and to expand itself, more and more, until in every sense Virginia was free. That I do not too highly color this picture, may be clearly seen by the testimony of even our warmest opponents themselves. Referring to the memorial, and its consequences, the *Annalist*, for example, of the Episcopal Church in Virginia, says:—"The storm which had so long been gathering, burst upon America, and the first blood was spilled at Lexington. Every colony was speedily on the alert, and a voluntary convention of the delegates to the Virginia Legislature, meeting after its adjournment, succeeded the last Royal Assembly that was ever held in the Ancient Dominion. "The Baptists," he adds, "were not slow in discovering the advantageous position in which the political troubles of the country had placed them. Their numerical strength was such as to make it important to both sides, to secure their influence; they knew this, and therefore determined to turn the circumstances to their profit as a sect. Persecution had taught them not to love the establishment, and they now saw before them, a reasonable prospect of overturning it entirely. In their Association they had calmly discussed the matter, and resolved on their course; in this course they were consistent to the end." "Now," he continues, "commenced the assault. Inspired with the ardors of a patriotism which accorded with their interest; or willing to avail themselves of a favorable opportunity to present in their

case an advantageous contrast to a part of the Church,* they addressed the Convention, and informed that body that their religious tenets presented no obstacle to their taking up arms and fighting for the country; and they tendered the services of their pastors, in promoting the enlistment of the youth of their religious persuasion. They presented also to the Convention a petition, in which they made the certainly reasonable request, that they might be allowed to worship God in their own way, without interruption; that they might be permitted to maintain [thus slightly he speaks of Baptist grievances, and appeals] their own ministers separate from others; that they might be married, and buried, and the like, without paying the clergy of other denominations." He closes by stating, and to this I invite your particular attention, "A complimentary answer was returned to their [the Baptists'] address, [by the Convention]† and an order was made that the sectarian clergy should have the privilege of performing divine service to their respective adherents in the army, equally with the regular chaplains of the established church. This it is believed, was the first step made towards placing the clergy of all denominations, upon an equal footing in Virginia."‡

The same declaration of principle, was upon various occasions afterwards, repeated by our fathers, and sometimes, as we have seen, in a form still more full and elaborate, and urged upon the attention of the legislative authorities. "The Declaration of Rights," and "the Constitution" proper, adopted the former, June the 12th, and the latter, June the 29th, 1776, embraced the Baptist doctrines in their whole extent. The article on this subject, is as follows:—

* He refers to the toryism and persecutions, which characterized the Episcopal Church in Virginia.

† Cannot this address be obtained and published?

‡ History Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia, pp. 137, 138.

“Religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and, therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and it is the mutual duty of all, to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity, towards each other.”* This was *the first victory* achieved by “The Early Baptists of Virginia.” It was a most glorious triumph; such a one as almost certainly to secure success in every subsequent conflict. *They had placed a summary of their principles at the very foundation of the Government of Virginia.*

The records of the General Association for 1776, have been unfortunately lost. We are, however, not without ample information of its proceedings, gathered from the Journals of the Legislature for that year, and from the current history of the times. From these we learn, that our brethren followed up with characteristic energy, the measures which previously they had prosecuted with so much success. Their example of the previous year, had in one respect especially, been contagious. “The Legislature which was convened in October, was addressed,” says Dr. Hawks, by “numerous petitions from all parts of the State, entreating for all religious sects, protection in the full exercise of their several modes of worship, and exemption from the payment of all taxes for the support of any church whatever, further than what might be agreeable to their own private choice or voluntary obligation.”† Prominent among these petitions, was the Hanover Presbytery, previously alluded to. This body was led by Patrick Henry, who lived in Hanover county, and whose political sentiments exercised over its ministers and members, an unlimited influence. Of these Presbyterian petitions, Dr. Foote, the historian of that

* Declaration of Rights, Article 16.

† History Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia, p. 139.

church in Virginia, says:—"They were for an ill-defined liberty of conscience, and the disseverance of religion from the civil power. That something ought to be done for dissenters was evident, but what should actually be done, was matter of contention."* Our brethren of that church, seem to have been somewhat slow in acquiring just ideas of "Religious Freedom." Nor is this surprising, when we consider their antecedents at Geneva, and in Scotland, to which I have already had occasion to refer. This was greatly to be regretted. But no such indefiniteness as that which characterized their proceedings, perplexed the minds of the Baptists. If *Presbyterians* were unwilling to be taxed by the State, "for the support of any church whatever, *further than what might be agreeable to their own private choice ;*" *Baptists* refused to be taxed by *the State*, even for the support of *their own church*. They chose to support their own church, in their own way, and denied that the State had any right to interfere, or even to inquire into any such matters. "Counter memorials," says Dr. Hawks, "on the part of *the Church*, [Episcopal,] and *the Methodists*, solicited *the continuance of the establishment*." They claimed this "upon principles of *justice*, of *wisdom*, and of *policy*."† They prayed "That the efforts made to injure what was left of the establishment might be checked."‡ The Baptists still maintained "That no established religion ought to exist," and accordingly, a bill was brought forward to "Repeal the law establishing the Episcopal Church." In the passage of this bill, our fathers achieved *another* triumph. The principal parts of the law, are as follows:—"Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, that all and every act of Parliament, by whatever title known, or distinguished, which renders criminal the maintaining any

* Sketches of Virginia, p. 323.

† History, &c., p. 142.

‡ Id. 147.

opinions in matters of religion, forbearing to repair [go] to church, or the exercising any mode of worship whatsoever, or which prescribes punishments for the same, shall henceforth be of no validity, or force, within this Commonwealth." And "that all dissenters of whatever denomination from the said church [established by law] shall, from and after the passing of this Act, be totally free, and exempt from all levies, taxes, and impositions whatever, towards supporting and maintaining the said Church."* This result, which fell so far short of what was proposed, was not gained without a most arduous and protracted struggle. In regard to it, Mr. Jefferson himself, says:—"The first Republican Legislature, which met in 1776, was crowded with petitions to abolish this spiritual tyranny [the established church.] These brought on the severest contest in which I have ever been engaged." "The petitions were referred to a committee of the whole house, on the state of the country; and after desperate contests in that committee, almost daily, from the 11th of October to the 5th of December, we prevailed so far only, as to repeal the laws which rendered criminal the maintenance of any religious opinions, [other than those of Episcopalians,] the forbearance of repairing to church, or the exercise of any [other than Episcopal] mode of worship; and to suspend only until the next session, levies on the members of that Church for the salaries of their own incumbents." "But our opponents carried in the general resolutions of November the 19th, a declaration, that religious assemblies ought to be regulated, and that provision ought to be made for continuing the succession of the clergy and superintending their conduct."†

On the assembling of the General Association, in 1777, a committee was appointed to examine the laws of the Commonwealth, and to report to them at as early a period

* Hening's Stat. at large, vol. ix., p. 164.

† Jefferson's Works, vol. i. pp. 32, 33.

as possible, such as were justly considered offensive. Their professed object was the removal of all such laws from the Statute Book, and the introduction of others which should firmly establish and maintain "Religious Liberty," in all its extent and bearings. That this end, difficult as it appeared to many, might be accomplished, their former successes had now inspired them with the most confident hopes. The committee performed the duty assigned them with great ability, and reported elaborately. Numerous laws were designated, and an address to the legislature was prepared, manifesting the injustice and impolicy of retaining them, all of which was effectually brought to the notice of that body. This session also was "flooded with petitions." The Baptists, with the masses of the people, seconded to a great extent by the Presbyterians, were the memorialists on the one side, and on the other the Episcopalians, and Methodists. Nothing, however, of importance occurred in relation to religion, unless the suspension of the taxes for the support of religious teachers for the year, may be so regarded,

During the meeting of the Association, in 1778, a committee of seven was appointed for the consideration of "Civil Grievances;" which, after mature deliberation, reported as such, among others, the project of a law then beginning to be advocated, for the support by the State of the religious teachers of *all the leading denominations*, thus placing them all on an equal footing in this respect; and also the law which confined the legal celebration of marriage to clergymen of the Episcopal church. As commissioners, to bear their address to the General Assembly, and to attend its sittings, they appointed Rev. Messrs. Jeremiah Walker, Elijah Craig, and John Williams. The exigencies of the country, however, were such, now in the midst of the war, that nothing of consequence in the cause of religious freedom was accomplished.

When the Association assembled, in 1779, Mr. Walker, after having reported the proceedings of their delegates at the capitol, which were cordially approved, submitted the form of a law, which had been carefully prepared, in consultation with their commissioners, during the last session of the legislature, and the adoption of which it was proposed to obtain at the earliest day possible, entitled, "An Act for the Establishment of Religious Freedom." This paper was read, and after full deliberation it was *Resolved*, unanimously, That the [proposed] bill, establishing Religious Liberty, in our opinion puts that subject upon its proper basis; prescribes the just limits of the powers of the state with regard to religion, and properly guards against partiality towards any religious denomination; that therefore we heartily approve the same, and wish it to pass into a law. It was also "*Ordered*, That this, our approbation of said bill, be transmitted to the public printers, to be inserted in the Gazette." The usual memorial, and delegates, were sent to the General Assembly, where still *another* triumph awaited their faithful services. It was the adoption of a law entitled, "An Act to repeal so much of the act for the support of the clergy, and for the regular collecting and paying the parish levies, as relates to the payment of the salaries heretofore given to the clergy of the Church of England," the principal parts of which are as follows:—"Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that so much of the act entitled an Act for the support of the clergy, and for the regular collecting, and paying of the parish levies; and of all and every other act, providing salaries for the ministers, and authorising the vestries to levy the same; shall be and the same are hereby repealed."* This was a bold and decisive blow. Dr. Hawks, in a strain of lamentation over the catastrophe, says:—"In each successive meeting of the legislature, from 1776 to 1779, this *questio vexata* was

* Hening's Stat. at Large, Vol. x., p. 197.

brought up for discussion, and the friends of voluntary contribution, apprehensive, probably, of a final vote against them, labored, and not without success, to suspend the decision from time to time, and leave the matter to be debated anew in the succeeding year. In 1779, all things being now ready for a final vote, the question was settled," "and *the establishment was finally put down. The Baptists* [he adds] were the principal promoters of this work, and in truth, aided more than any other denomination in its accomplishment." "In the Associations of that sect, held from year to year, a prominent subject of discussion always was as to the best mode of carrying on the war against the former establishment. *After their final success in this matter,*" "their next efforts were to procure the sale of the church property."*

The records that remain of the General Association for 1780, are exceedingly meagre.† From contemporaneous history we however ascertain, that the Baptists were still moving with their accustomed vigor, and influence. In the legislature of this session, one more important victory was gained, Hitherto no person could celebrate legally the rites of matrimony, but a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, and according to the forms prescribed in the English Liturgy. Against this law our people had been for five years annually petitioning. An act was passed in October of this year, "declaring what shall be a lawful marriage," which provided "That it shall be lawful for any minister, of any society, or congregation of Christians," "to join together as man and wife, those who may apply to them, agreeable to the rules and usages of the respective societies to which the parties to be married respectively belong."‡ This law was, however, clogged with various

* Hist. Prot. Epis. Ch. in Va., pp. 152, 153.

† I am astonished that so many of the papers of this body, and also of the General Committee, have been lost.

‡ Hening's Stat., at Large, Vol. X., pp. 361.

“provisoes,” and it was not until 1784, that these were removed, and the ministers of all denominations placed, as to their authority in the premises, upon a perfectly equal footing.

The session of the General Association of 1781, was prevented, by the passage through the country at the time when it should have been held, of the British troops under Lord Cornwallis. The messengers from sixteen churches assembled, and after appointing the time and place of the next annual meeting adjourned. At the session of 1782, and also of 1783, the remaining laws of the State, regarded by them as unequal, and oppressive, especially the glebe-laws, and the scheme now somewhat popular, to assess taxes upon the people, to support the ministers of the several denominations, were the theme of their remonstrances, and their earnest petitions were sent up for the passage of the bill “Declaring Religious Freedom.” To bear these memorials to the Legislature, and superintend them before that body, Jeremiah Walker was appointed by the former session, and by the latter, were designated Reuben Ford and John Waller. The extraordinary state of the country, however, prevented, on the part of the General Assembly, any very important action in relation to these subjects.

The General Association had now become an immense body. Its members were scattered over a large extent of territory. The distance they had to travel rendered their annual gatherings at one place extremely laborious and expensive. “They would, probably,” says Dr. Semple, “long before this date, have been divided into districts, had they not been holden together by apprehensions of oppression from the civil government. They could not make head against their powerful and numerous opponents, with any hope of success, unless they were united among themselves. In order to be all of one mind, it was necessary they should all assemble around one council board. For these reasons the General Association was kept up as long as

it was. Finding it, however, wearisome to collect so many from such distant parts, and having already secured their most important civil rights, they determined to hold one more General Association, and then dividing into districts, to form some plan to keep a Standing Sentinel for political purposes.”* That meeting was held in October, 1783, when memorials on the same subjects as the last two years, were sent to the Legislature, and the following resolution adopted:—

“*Resolved*, That our General, or Annual Association cease, and that a General Committee be instituted, composed of not more than four delegates from each District Association, to meet annually, to consider matters that may be for the good of the whole Society, and that the present Association be divided into four Districts, Upper, and Lower Districts, on each side of James River.”†

Thus was formed “the General Committee,” composed of members annually elected by the several District Associations, and having charge of all those interests previously under the direction of the General Association. Its first meeting was held, commencing October 9th, 1784. Memorials were prepared protesting against the “Vestry Law,” and against the proposed laws “for a General Assessment,” and for the “Incorporation of Religious Societies [that is, churches, or denominations,] which were now in agitation,” and placed in the hands of Rev. Reuben Ford, who was appointed to lay them before the Legislature, and generally to represent the interests of the Baptists in that body.

At the annual session of the General Committee, which commenced August 13th, 1785, “Mr. Ford reported, that according to the directions given him, he presented their memorial and petition to the Honorable the General Assembly; that certain amendments were made to the ‘marriage law [before referred to] which rendered it satis-

* Hist. Va. Baptists, p. 67.

† Hist. Va. Baptist, p. 68.

factory;' and that the anticipated bill for a 'General Assessment,' had been introduced, and would have passed into a law, but that 'when at that stage in which it was called an engrossed bill,' our friends had succeeded in a motion, that the people might be more fully consulted, to refer it to the next Assembly."

Great excitement now prevailed among "the Early Baptists of Virginia." *Four* measures of the utmost importance were pending; the *Assessment bill*; the bill for the *Incorporation of Churches*, (denominations;) the law for the *Declaration of Religious Freedom*; and for the repeal of the *Vestry* and *Glebe laws*. In view of the whole subject the General Committee now made a Declaration of Principles, as the General Association had before done, with reference to civil government, the heads of which are as follows:—"It is believed to be repugnant to the spirit of the gospel, for the Legislature to proceed thus, in matters of religion; that no human laws ought to be established for this purpose, [its support and regulation,] but that every person ought to be left entirely free in respect to matters of religion; that the holy Author of our religion needs no such compulsory measures for the promotion of his cause; that the gospel wants not the feeble arm of man for its support; that it has made, and will again through Divine power, make its way against all opposition; and that should the Legislature assume the right of taxing the people for the support of the gospel, it will be destructive to religious liberty."* Their memorial was prepared, signed, not only officially, but by thousands of the people, and placed in the hands of Rev. Reuben Ford, who was appointed to represent them at the Capitol.

A great and decisive battle was now to be fought, and it is proper for us to pause, survey the field, and ascertain the positions, and objects of the various parties. The Episco-

* Semple's Hist. Va. Baptist, p. 71.

papists, and Methodists, always allies, and always the enemies of Religious Freedom, sent up their petitions to the Legislature, in favor of assessments upon the people, for the support of ministers; in favor of incorporating the several religious denominations, or churches; in favor of retaining in full force, the old vestry, and glebe laws; and against the law "Declaring Religious Freedom." Presbyterians petitioned against *such* incorporations as included *only ministers*, (the form of the proposed bill,) but *favoured* those which included also *the people* of their churches, and were advocates of *such an assessment*, as they themselves proposed. They speak as follows:—"We have understood that a comprehensive incorporating act has been, and is at present in agitation, whereby ministers of the Gospel as such, of certain descriptions, shall have legal advantages, which are not proposed to be extended to the people at large, of any denomination. A proposition has been made by some gentlemen in the House of Delegates, we are told, to extend the grace to us, among others, in our professional capacity. If this be so, we are bound to acknowledge, with gratitude, our obligations to such gentlemen, for their inclination to favor us with the sanction of public authority in the discharge of our duty. But as the scheme of incorporating clergymen, *independent of the religious communities to which they belong*, is inconsistent with our ideas of propriety, we request the liberty of declining any such solitary honor, should it be again proposed. To form clergymen into a distinct order in the community, and especially where it would be possible for them to have the principal direction of a considerable public estate by such incorporation, has a tendency to render them independent at length, of the churches whose ministers they are; and this has been too often found by experience, to produce ignorance, immorality, and neglect of the duties of their station." After stating various general considerations, they add:—"It is

upon this principle alone, [its moralizing power,] in our opinion, that a legislative body has a right to interfere in religion at all, and of consequence we suppose that this interference ought only to extend to the preserving of the public worship of the Deity, and the supporting of institutions for inculcating the great fundamental principles of religion, without which society could not easily exist. Should it be thought necessary at present, for the Assembly to exert this right of supporting religion in general, by an assessment on all the people, we would wish it to be done on the most *liberal plan*." "We therefore earnestly pray that nothing may be done in the case, inconsistent with the proper objects of human legislation, or the Declaration of Rights, as published at the Revolution. We hope that the assessment will not be proposed under the idea of supporting religion as a spiritual system, relating to the care of the soul, and preparing it for its future destiny. We hope that no attempt will be made [by the Legislature] to point out articles of faith, that are not essential to the preservation of society; or to settle modes of worship; or to interfere in the internal government of religious communities; *or to render the ministers of religion, independent of the will of the people whom they serve*." They presented their own plan of assessment, as follows:—1st. Religion as a spiritual system, is not to be considered as an object of human legislation, but may in a civil view, as preserving the existence, and promoting the happiness of society. 2nd. That public worship, and public periodical instruction to the people, be maintained in this view, by a general assessment for this purpose. 3rd. That every man, as a good citizen, be obliged to declare himself attached to some religious community, publicly known to profess the belief of one God, his righteous Providence, our accountableness to him, and a future state of rewards and punishments. 4th. That every citizen should have liberty annually to direct his assessed

proportion to such community as he chooses. 5th. That twelve titheables, or more, to the amount of a hundred and fifty families, as near as local circumstances will admit, shall be incorporated, and exclusively direct the application of the money contributed for their support.”* On the other subjects before the Legislature, our Presbyterian brethren said nothing. On the subject of incorporations, and of assessments, as well as several others, the *Baptists*, therefore, stood alone. The principal part of their Memorial was as follows:—

“We, the subscribers, citizens of the said Commonwealth, having taken into serious consideration, a bill, printed by order of the last session of the General Assembly, entitled, ‘A Bill Establishing a Provision, for Teachers of the Christian Religion,’ and conceiving that the same if finally armed with the sanctions of a law, will be a dangerous abuse of power, are bound as faithful members of a free state, to remonstrate against it, and to declare the reasons by which we are determined.” We remonstrate against the said bill:—†

“Because freedom of religion is the inalienable right of every man; because religion cannot legally be the subject of legislation; and because it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be one of the noblest characteristics of the late revolution. The freemen of America did not wait until usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise, and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it. Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease, any particular sect of

* Memorial of Hanover Presbytery, 1784, in Foote's Sketches, pp. 336-338.

† A part of this Memorial has already been quoted for another purpose.

Christians, in exclusion of all other sects? That the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute three pence only of his property, for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment, in all cases whatsoever?

“ Because, the bill violates that equality which ought to be the basis of every law, and which is the more indispensable in proportion as the validity, or expediency of any law, is more liable to be impeached. As the bill violates equality by subjecting some to peculiar burdens, so it violates the same principle by granting to others peculiar exemptions.

“ Because the establishment proposed by the bill, is not requisite for the support of the Christian religion. To say that it is, is a contradiction to the Christian religion itself; for every page of it, disavows a dependence on the power of this world. It is a contradiction to fact; for it is known that this religion both existed, and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them; and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence, and the ordinary care of providence. Nay it is a contradiction in terms; for a religion not invented by human policy, must have pre-existed, and been supported, before it was established by human policy. It is, moreover, to weaken in those who profess this religion, a pious confidence in its innate excellence, and the patronage of its author; and to foster in those who reject it, a suspicion that its friends are too conscious of its fallacies to trust it to its own merits.

“ Because, experience witnesses that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity, and efficacy of religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less, in

all places, pride and indolence in the clergy ; ignorance and servility in the laity ; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution. Enquire of the teachers of Christianity, for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest lustre. Those of every sect, point to the ages prior to its incorporation with civil policy. Propose a restoration to this primitive state, in which its teachers depended on the voluntary rewards of their flocks ; many of them predict its downfall ! On which side ought their testimony to have greatest weight ? When for, or when against their interest ?

“ Because, the establishment in question, is not necessary for the support of civil government. If it be urged as necessary for the support of civil government, it is only as a means of supporting religion, and if it be not necessary for the latter purpose, it cannot be necessary for the former. If religion be not within the cognizance of civil government, how can its legal establishment be said to be necessary to civil government ? What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had, on civil society ? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny, on the ruins of the civil authority ; in more instances have they been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny ; in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found an established clergy, convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure, and perpetuate it, needs them not. Such a government will be best supported by protecting every citizen in the enjoyment of his religion, with the same equal hand which protects his person, and his property ; by neither invading the equal rights of any sect, nor suffering any sect to invade those of another.

“ Because, the proposed establishment is a departure from that generous policy, which offering an asylum to

the persecuted, and oppressed of every nation, and religion, promised a lustre to our country, and an accession to the number of its citizens. What a melancholy mark is the bill, of sudden degeneracy! Instead of holding forth an asylum to the persecuted, it is itself a signal of persecution. It degrades from the equal rank of citizens, all those whose opinions in religion, do not bend to those of the legislative authority. Distant as it may be, in its present form, from the inquisition, it differs from it only in degree. The one is the first step, the other is the last in the career of intolerance. The magnanimous sufferer under the cruel scourge, in foreign regions, must view the bill as a beacon on our coast, warning him to seek some other haven, where liberty, and philanthropy, in their due extent, may offer a more certain repose from his troubles.

“Because, it will have a like tendency to banish our citizens. The allurements presented by other situations are every day thinning our number. To superadd a fresh motive to emigration, by revoking the liberty which they now enjoy, would be the same species of folly which has dishonored and depopulated flourishing kingdoms.

“Because, it will destroy that moderation and harmony, which the forbearance of our laws to intermeddle with religion, has produced among its several sects. Torrents of blood have been spilt, in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm to extinguish religious discord, by proscribing all differences of religious opinions. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow, and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease. The American theatre has exhibited proofs that equal, and complete liberty, if it does not wholly eradicate it, sufficiently destroys its malignant influence on the health and prosperity of the State. If, with the salutary effects of this system under our own eyes, we begin to contract the bounds of religious freedom,

we know no name that will too severely reproach our folly. At least, let warning be taken at the first fruits of the threatened innovation. The very appearance of the bill has transformed that "Christian forbearance, love, and charity,"* which of late mutually prevailed, into animosities and jealousies, which may not soon be appeased. What mischiefs may not be dreaded, should this enemy to the public quiet be armed with the force of a law?

"Because the policy of the bill is adverse to the diffusion of the light of Christianity. The first wish of those who enjoy this precious gift, ought to be, that it may be imparted to the whole race of mankind, Compare the number of those who have as yet received it, with the number still remaining under the dominion of false religions, and how small is the former! Does the policy of the bill tend to lessen the disproportion? No; it at once discourages those who are strangers to the light of truth from coming into the regions of it, and countenances, by example, the nations who continue in darkness in shutting out those who might convey it to them. Instead of leveling as far as possible, every obstacle to the victorious progress of truth, the bill, with an ignoble and unchristian timidity, would circumscribe it with a wall of defence, and give all latitude to the encroachments of error.

"Because, attempts to enforce, by legal sanctions, acts obnoxious to so great a proportion of citizens, tend to enervate the laws in general, and to slacken the bands of society. If it be difficult to execute any law which is not generally deemed necessary, or salutary, what must be the case where it is deemed invalid, and dangerous? And what may be the effect of so striking an example of impotency in the government, on its general authority?

"Because, a measure of such singular magnitude and deli-

* Declaration of Rights, Art. 16.

cacy ought not to be imposed without the clearest evidence that it is called for by a majority of citizens, and no satisfactory method is yet proposed by which the voice of the majority in this case may be determined, or its influence secured. 'The people of the respective counties are [indeed] requested to signify their opinion, respecting the adoption of the bill, to the next Legislature.'* But the representation must be made equal, before the voice, either of the representatives or of the counties, will be that of the people. Our hope is, that none of the former will, after due consideration, espouse the dangerous principle of the bill. Should the event disappoint us, it will still leave us in full confidence that a fair appeal to the latter will reverse the sentence against our liberties.

"Because, finally, 'the equal right of every citizen to the free exercise of his religion, according to the dictates of conscience,' is held by the same tenure with all our other rights. If we recur to its origin, it is equally the gift of nature; if we ask for its importance, it cannot be less dear to us; if we consult the 'declaration of those rights which pertain to the good people of Virginia, as the basis and foundation of government,' it is enumerated with equal solemnity, or rather, with studied emphasis. Either, then, we must say, that the will of the Legislature is the only measure of their authority, and that, in the plenitude of their authority, they may sweep away all our fundamental rights; or, that they are bound to leave this particular right untouched and sacred. Either we must say that they may control the freedom of the press, may abolish the trial by jury, may swallow up the executive and judiciary powers of the State, nay, that they may annihilate our very right of suffrage, and erect themselves into an independent and hereditary assembly; or, we must say that they have

* Referred to in the proceedings of the late session of the General Committee.

no authority to enact into a law the bill under consideration.

"We, the subscribers, say that the General Assembly of this Commonwealth have no such authority, and, that no effort on our part may be omitted against so dangerous a usurpation, we oppose to it this remonstrance, earnestly praying, as we are in duty bound, that the Supreme Law-giver of the universe, by illuminating those to whom it is addressed, may, on the one hand, turn their counsels from every act which would affront His holy prerogative, or violate the trust committed to them; and, on the other, guide them into every measure which may be worthy of His blessing, may redound to their own praise, and may establish more firmly the liberties, the prosperity, and the happiness of this Commonwealth."*

These, Gentlemen, are the attitudes, as shown by their memorials, of the several parties, as they stood before the Legislature of 1785, in which so many measures, all involving vital principles, were pending, and now to be definitely settled. The conflict was long, and arduous. The first result was the defeat of the bill, which proposed the assessment, by the Legislature, of taxes upon the people for the support, in connection with the several denominations, of the ministers of religion. In this result the early Baptists of Virginia gained *yet another* triumphant victory. And this achievement was the more honorable to them, because all the other denominations, with Patrick Henry, were against them. "The Baptists," truly remarks Dr. Hawks, "were the principal promoters of *this work*, [the defeat of the assessment bill] and, in truth, aided *more than any other denomination* in its accomplishment." Referring to *the course of the Presbyterians*, who sometimes petitioned the Legislature *against*, and sometimes *in favor of assessments*,

* Semple's History of the Virginia Baptists, pp. 435-444.

and who, at one time, were all, not even excepting the Hanover Presbytery, the advocates of assessments, this historian, who so much *deprecates* the “*religious liberty*” of Virginia, remarks: “There can be little doubt that the distinguished individual [Mr. Jefferson] who was the leader in securing the adoption of the measures already detailed, entertained the belief that it would be no difficult task to complete at a future session the work which he had begun, and to negative the plan of a general assessment for the support of Christianity; nor would his expectation in this particular have been disappointed, [he alludes to the previous delays of the bill, and postponements of similar measures,] but for a circumstance recorded by himself,* as having interposed obstacles. In his chief object, that of giving a death-blow to the legalized superiority of the Establishment over all other denominations of Christians, he was very cordially supported by a large body of allies, who belonged to the dissenting interest; but when that great end was once obtained, and every religious society stood upon the same level, the question in dispute assumed to these allies [the Presbyterians] a very different aspect, and they deserted the standard under which they had before achieved their victory. They had prostrated the Church; they had proved themselves not at all reluctant to strip her clergy of that important maintenance which was secured to them by the possession of property; but they now manifested an aversion, more natural than consistent, to being left to find a precarious support for themselves, in the tender mercies of a set of voluntary contributors; and the manner, almost approaching to querulousness, in which this desertion is recorded, [by Mr. Jefferson,] accompanied, as it is, by an insinuation as to the motives of the deserters, justifies the suspicion that the desertion was felt to be ungenerous.

* Jefferson's Works.

The impartial reader of a future day will probably concede that it was a game not unskilfully played, in which the troops outwitted the general." He adds: "The Baptist historian boasts that they [the Baptists] alone were uniform in their efforts to destroy the system of an assessment, and introduce the plan of voluntary contributions; that in the other denominations there was much division of sentiment between the ministers and people; and that remonstrances came at last from none but the Baptists."*

Nor was *this the only victory* achieved by "The Early Baptists of Virginia," during the sitting of the Legislature of 1785. They *gained another*, still more important if possible, in the passage of the law "*Establishing Religious Freedom*." The origin of this law, we have seen, is the Declaration of Principles, by the General Association, in 1775; the subsequent close intimacy, and relations, between our Commissioners, and Mr. Jefferson, and Mr. Madison, which made the former its draftsman, and the latter its successful advocate; its approval by the Association of 1779, to which it was submitted by its framers; and the zeal, and perseverance, with which it was urged upon the Legislature, from year to year, by our people. Of his connection with this act, Mr. Jefferson himself, gives the following account:—"Early in the session of 1776, to which I returned, [from Congress,] I moved, and presented a bill, for 'the Revision of the Laws,' which was passed on the 24th of October, and on the 6th of November, Mr. Pendleton, Mr. Wythe, George Mason, Thomas L. Lee, and myself, were appointed a committee to execute the work. We agreed to meet in Fredericksburg, to settle the plan of operations, and to distribute the work. We met there accordingly, on the 18th of January, 1777. The first question was, whether we should propose to abolish the whole existing system of laws,

* Hist. Prot. Ep. Ch. in Va., pp. 151. 152. 153.

and prepare a new, and complete Institute, or preserve the general system, and only modify it to suit the present state of things." The latter course was adopted. Mr. Mason resigned, Mr. Lee died. "We were employed in the work from that time to February, 1779, when we met in Williamsburg; that is to say, Mr. Pendleton, Mr. Wythe, and myself; and meeting day by day, we examined critically, our several parts, sentence by sentence, scrutinising, and amending, until we had agreed on the whole. We then returned home, had fair copies made of our several parts, which were reported to the General Assembly, January 18th, 1779, by Mr. Wythe and myself, Mr. Pendleton's residence being distant, and he having authorised us by letter, to declare his approbation. We had into this work, brought so much of the Common Law as it was thought necessary to alter; all the British Statutes, from Magna Charta to the present day; and all the laws of Virginia, from the establishment of our Legislature, in the 4th of James the 1st., to the present time, which we thought should be retained, within the compass of a hundred and twenty-six bills, making a printed folio of ninety pages only. Some bills were taken out occasionally, from time to time, and passed. But the main body of the work was not entered upon by the Legislature, until after the general peace, in 1785, when by the unwearied exertions of Mr. Madison, in opposition to the endless quibbles, chicaneries, perversions, vexations, and delays of lawyers, and demi-lawyers, most of the bills were passed by the Legislature, with little alteration. 'The bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,' the principles of which had, to a certain degree, been enacted before, I had drawn in all the latitude of reason, and right. It still met with opposition, but with some mutilations of the preamble, it was finally passed." "The passage of the bill took place in December, 1785, more

than six years after it had been first reported to the House.”* The main features of the law are as follows:—

“Whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free ; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burdens, or civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy, and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy Author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do ; and the impious presumption of legislators, and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who being themselves but fallible, and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking, as the only true, and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, have established, and maintained false religions over the greater part of the world, and through all time ; that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money, for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful, and tyrannical, or even to force him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporary rewards which proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labors for the instruction of mankind ; that our civil rights have no dependence upon our religious opinions, any more than our opinions on physics or geometry ; that, therefore, the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence, by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust, and emolument, unless he profess, or renounce, this,

* Jefferson's Works, Vol. 1, pp. 34—36.

or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously, of those privileges, and advantages, to which in common with his fellow-citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends only to corrupt the principles of that religion it was meant to encourage, by bribing with monopoly of wordly honors, and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that though indeed, those are criminal who do not withstand such temptations, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the propagation, or profession of principles, on supposition of their ill-tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course, judge of that tendency, will make his opinions the rule of his judgment, and approve, or condemn the sentiments of others only, as they shall square with, or differ from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government, for its officers to interfere, when principles break out into overt acts against peace, and good order; and finally that ‘truth is great, and will prevail,’ if left to herself, that she is the proper antagonist of error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument, and debate, errors ceasing to be dangerous when she is permitted freely to contradict them:

“Be it enacted by this General Assembly, that no man shall be compelled to frequent, or support, any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall he be enforced, or restrained, molested, or burdened, in his body, or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions, or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.” “And that we do

declare that the rights hereby asserted, are of the natural rights of mankind."*

It is only necessary to compare this law with the various Declarations of Principles on political subjects, and Memorials of "The Early Baptists of Virginia," already before you, to see that they are precisely identical. That it is emphatically a Baptist law, is conceded by our opponents themselves. Dr. Hawks, ignorant of the relations between our fathers, and Messrs. Jefferson and Madison, and anxious to stigmatise the law as an emanation of the supposed infidelity of the former gentleman, remarks:—"An act was passed by the Legislature of 1785, which was viewed by many [Episcopalians, and Methodists] as subversive in its declarations, of the christian religion, and called forth at the time, the severest animadversions of some who still revered the faith of the Apostles. This was the 'Act for Establishing Religious Freedom,' and preceded by a Memorial from the pen of Mr. Madison, which is supposed to have led to the passage of the law."† It is matter of record in their proceedings, that when in 1785, they had repeated their Declaration of Principles, the General Committee placed them in the hands of Mr. Madison, with the request that he would embody them in their behalf, in a Memorial to the Legislature, praying for the passage of this law.‡ These proceedings were had in August. The Legislature assembled in October, two months afterwards. Meanwhile, the address had been numerously signed, and sent to the Capitol. Mr. Madison read the paper, and with all his great powers, advocated the bill. By this means, as our opponents themselves confess, the passage of the bill was obtained. Mr. Jefferson also refers to the same fact. He says:—"I prepared the Act for Religious Freedom, in 1777, as part of the revisal, which was not [the revisal] re-

* Code of Virginia, p. 360. † Hist. Prot. Epis. Ch. in Va. pp. 173, 174.

‡ Semple's Hist. in loco.

ported to the Assembly until 1779, and that particular law not passed till 1785, and then by the efforts of Mr. Madison.” *

In these, and other facts, now before you, in this connection, we have an explanation of reports which have heretofore been floating in Virginia society, and on the surface of literature, in the somewhat intangible form of general rumor. Not a few writers of history, and other works, have referred to them, in about the same terms. They have told us, that Mr. Jefferson was in the habit of attending the meetings of a Baptist Church in his neighborhood, and closely scrutinizing its polity; and that he afterwards said, that he had gathered many of his ideas of what a Republic should be, from the government of that Church. Mrs. Madison, according to Dr. Curtis, in his late admirable work on the “Progress of Baptist Principles,” testified that he so stated to her. Of the correctness of this declaration there is no reason to doubt. Mr. Jefferson himself, whatever he might have *said* to his friends, *published* nothing that I have seen on the subject. Another fact also, in corroboration of this, is unquestionably true, as many yet living aver, and not a few have in my own presence asserted; it is that Mr. Jefferson was accustomed freely to confess to his associates, particularly the ministers, and others of our church, that the Baptist doctrines on that subject, had enlightened, and fixed his principles in relation to Religious Freedom. No one, I presume, can contemplate the facts now before us, and then seriously question the truth of this general statement.

In relation to another of the measures before the Legislature of 1785, our brethren signally failed. Strangely contradictory as it was, of all their lately declared principles, and proceedings, this Legislature passed a law for

“The Incorporation of the Protestant Episcopal Church.” Its leading provisions were as follows:—

“Whereas, The clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church, by their petition presented, have requested that their church may be incorporated, Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That every minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church now holding a parish within this Commonwealth, either by appointment from a vestry, or induction from a governor, and all the vestrymen in the different parishes now instituted, or which may hereafter be instituted within this Commonwealth, that is to say, the minister, and vestrymen of each parish respectively, or in case of a vacancy, the vestry of each parish, and their successors for ever, are hereby made a body corporate, and politic, etc.” By this law each vestry could hold property not to exceed an annual income of eight hundred pounds; could sue, and be sued; hold the glebe lands, etc.* In favor of this bill, Patrick Henry gave all his great powers, and it became a law.

The succeeding session of the General Committee was held, commencing August 5th, 1786, at Anderson’s, in Buckingham. Mr. Ford reported that he “waited on the House of Assembly, according to appointment; that the bill proposing a General Assessment had been defeated; and that the bill Establishing Religious Freedom had passed into a law; also, that the act deprecated by them heretofore, and against which they had, at former meetings, earnestly petitioned, Incorporating the Episcopal Church, had been adopted, one effect of which was, to continue in the hands of that sect, a large amount of property, the glebes especially, belonging rightfully to the State, and thereby to give them a great advantage over christians of other denominations.” After mature consideration, and discussion, the

* Henings’ Stat. at Large, Vol. ii., p. 532.

Committee adopted unanimously, the following resolution, which they carried out with their usual energy:—"Resolved, That petitions ought to be drawn up, and circulated in the different counties [for the signatures of the people] and presented to the next General Assembly, praying for the repeal of the Act Incorporating the Episcopal Church; and that the property vested by that act, in said church, be sold, and the money applied to the public use." To carry out these purposes, and to attend the Legislature, Rev. Messrs. Reuben Ford, and John Leland, were appointed, on behalf of the General Committee. The agitations commenced, and a burst of indignation went throughout the State. The Legislature assembled, and of its proceedings in the premises, Dr. Hawks speaks as follows:—

"The efforts of the Presbyterians, and Baptists to procure memorials to be presented to the Legislature, for a repeal of the act incorporating the church, and for the distribution of its property for the public benefit, have already been recorded. The Convention [of the Episcopal Church] was not insensible to the danger to be apprehended from the deep seated hostility of these two denominations, and therefore prepared a petition to the Legislature to counteract the effect of their memorials, and recommended to the several parishes, to prepare, and present petitions of a similar character. But all was in vain. In the next session of the General Assembly of Virginia, which succeeded the Convention, these memorials, and petitions, were brought up for consideration, and on the 5th of December, 1786, the House of Delegates, among other resolutions, adopted the following:—"That the act for incorporating the Episcopal Church ought to be repealed." On the 9th of January, 1787, the bill to carry into effect these resolutions, was passed by the Senate, and thus became the law of Virginia." *

* Hist. Prot. Epis. Ch. in Va, p. 194.

The Committee assembled August 10th, 1787, at Dover, in Goodland. Messrs. Ford and Leland, reported that according to their instructions, they presented the memorial entrusted to them, to the Legislature; that the act incorporating the Episcopal Church was repealed in accordance with their wishes; but that the Glebe laws remained untouched, and in full force." Again the Committee passed a resolution, declaring the Glebes public property, and that they ought to be sold, and the proceeds applied to public purposes. Their ends gained, as will be seen, in regard to these glebes, and their victory was complete. These splendid estates, so numerous and so valuable, were still in the hands of the Episcopal clergy. Their alienation, and sale, our fathers found to be their most difficult work.

I here take occasion to say, that "*The Vestry law*," of which we have frequently spoken, was adopted March 23rd, 1660-1, and provided, "That twelve of the most able men of each parish, be by the major part of said parish, chosen to be a vestry; out of which number, the minister, and vestry, to make choice of two church wardens yearly; as also in the case of the death of any vestryman, or his departure from the parish, that the said minister, and vestry, make choice of another in his room." To qualify them for office, they were required to take the oath of supremacy to the British Sovereign, and "Subscribe the doctrine, and discipline of the Church of England." Among their most prominent duties, they were "To lay the parish levy, and collect, and pay over the amount to the minister."* And what the glebes in question were, will perhaps, be best understood by reference to some of the leading laws by which they were brought into being. The act of March 6th, 1655-6, provides that parishes be laid out in every

* Laws of Va., revised, fol. ed. 1769, pp. 2, 250.

county, and that by a tax upon the people, funds be collected to purchase "a glebe, and stock, for the minister that shall be settled there." It was enacted March 9th, 1657-8, that further taxes be laid upon the people, for the "purchasing of glebes, and stock, for the ministers." These taxes were levied, collected, and disbursed, in each parish, by "the vestries thereof." In 1748 it was enacted, "That in every parish in this Dominion, where a good and convenient glebe is not already purchased, and appropriated, a good and convenient tract of land, to contain two hundred acres at least, shall be purchased by the vestry, and assigned, and set apart, for a glebe, for the use of the minister of such parish, and his successors in all times hereafter; and where mansion, and other convenient out houses are not already erected for the habitation of the minister, it is hereby declared, and enacted, that the vestry of every such parish, shall have power, and they are hereby authorized, and required, to cause to be erected, and built, on such glebe, one convenient mansion-house, kitchen, barn, stables, dairy, meat-house, corn-house, garden well paled, or enclosed with a mud fence, with such other conveniences as they shall think fit; and to levy the charge of the glebe lands, and buildings, on the titheable persons, in their respective parishes."* Each parish had one of these farms for the Episcopal minister. They were usually among the best in the country. They were bought with the money of the people, of all the people, without distinction of sect. Our brethren maintained, therefore, that they belonged to the people, and ought now to be returned to them, to assist in paying the debts of the country. This was the result they sought. Often had they been foiled in their purpose. Long was this act of justice delayed. But never for a moment did they lose sight of their object, or relax their exertions for its attainment. Memorials were regularly

* Ut sup pp. 250, 251, 252.

prepared, and commissioners sent to the Legislature; in 1787, Eleazar Clay, Reuben Ford, John Waller, and John Williams; in 1788, Messrs. Leland, Waller, and Clay. But to pursue this detail is unnecessary. The Legislature assembled in 1799, and our memorials were presented, and favorably received. The following act was then passed, entitled "An act to repeal certain acts, and to declare the construction of the Bill of Rights, and Constitution, concerning Religion."

"Whereas the Constitution of the State of Virginia, hath pronounced the government of the King of England to have been totally dissolved by the Revolution, hath substituted in place of the said government so dissolved, a new civil government, and hath in the Bill of Rights excepted from the powers given to the substituted government, the power of reviving any species of ecclesiastical or church government, in lieu of that so dissolved, by referring the subject of religion to the conscience; and whereas the several acts presently recited, do admit the church established under the regal government, to have been continued so subsequently to the constitution; have bestowed property upon that church; have asserted a legislative right to establish any religious sect; and have incorporated religious sects; all of which is inconsistent with the principles of the constitution, and of religious freedom, and manifestly tends to the re-establishment of a national church; for remedy whereof," and with this preamble it was enacted that the several acts of 1776, of 1779, of 1784, of 1785, of 1786, and 1788, be repealed; and "that the act for the Establishment of Religious Freedom contains the true construction of the Bill of Rights, and Constitution."*

This law, as will be seen, was a necessary preparation for, but did not order the sale of the glebes. This was accomplished by the law of January 12th, 1802, which is

* Laws of Va., edit. 1803, p. 388.

as follows:—"Whereas, the General Assembly, on the 24th day of January, 1799, by their act of that date, repealed all the laws relative to the late Protestant Episcopal Church, and declared a true exposition of the Bill of Rights, and Constitution, respecting the same, to be contained in the act entitled 'An act for Establishing Religious Freedom,' thereby recognizing the principle that all property formerly belonging to the said church, of every description, devolved on the good people of this Commonwealth, on the dissolution of the British government here, in the same degree in which the right and interest of the said church was derived therein from them;" and the General Assembly proceeds to order the sale of the glebes. The final victory of The Early Baptists of Virginia was gained; their triumph was complete. This closing measure Dr. Hawks attributes emphatically to the Baptists. Speaking of the decision of the General Committee in 1787, he says, "That vote decided the fate of the glebes." In another place he observes: "After the final success of the Baptists, [in their several previous measures,] their next efforts were to procure the sale of the church lands, and their efforts never ceased until the glebes were sold." Again he remarks:—"The war which they [the Baptists] waged against the church, was a war of extermination. They seem to have known no relentings, and their hostility never ceased for *seven-and-twenty years*. They revenged themselves for their sufferings, by the almost total ruin of the church;" the loss of all its vast landed possessions in Virginia.*

Thus, gentlemen, have we seen the designs in relation to the government of the State, of The Early Baptists of Virginia; the measures they adopted; and the manner in which they prosecuted them to a successful issue. They labored long, and anxiously. Their success was complete. They embodied all their political principles as we have

* Hist. of Ch. in Va., pp. 152, 153.

clearly shown, gradually, but surely, in the Declaration of Rights, the Constitution, and the Statutes of the State. The enemies of religious freedom, and equality, resisted strenuously. The struggle was intense, and protracted. They employed every stratagem to evade, or to turn aside our pursuit. They relinquished their ground only as they were forced, and then inch by inch, and with the bitterest reluctance. All their movements the Baptists watched with sleepless vigilance; met firmly, and gallantly, at every point; and drove them back discomfitted. Upon the legislative attention they continued to press their doctrines, until their whole purpose was fully accomplished. The government of Virginia assumed the form that met their entire approval. It became at length, it yet remains, God grant it may ever continue, perfectly Baptist.

Nor did the results of their labors terminate here. They extended their vigilance, and with the same success, to the organization of the General Government. They had extraordinary advantage arising out of the fact that their ablest coadjutors at home, were prominent actors in the formation of the government of the United States. The Constitution of the Federal Union, was adopted in 1787. The VIth. Article refers to religion in this language:—"No religious test shall ever be required, as a qualification to any office, or public trust, under the United States." The General Committee met, March the 7th, 1788, at Williams', in Goochland. "The first Religious Political subject," [I quote from the minutes,] "that was taken up," was, "Whether the new Federal Constitution, which had now lately made its appearance in public, made sufficient provision for the secure enjoyment of religious liberty; on which it was agreed unanimously that it did not."* Upon consultation on the subject with Mr. Madison, the Committee determined to address General Washington. At this meeting,

* Semple's Hist. of Va. Baptists, pp. 76, 77.

a correspondence was present, from the Baptists of New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. Mr. Leland was appointed to bear to them a response from the Committee, in person, and to solicit their co-operation, which was cordially granted. The address to Washington was presented in August, 1789, and by his powerful aid, together with that of the other gentlemen named, was carried through Congress the next month, September, 1789, the amendment which is now the supreme law on that subject, of the United States. It is one of those amendments set down as proposed by Virginia, and is as follows:—"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Thus do we see that the Baptists embodied their principles not only in the Constitution of Virginia, but also in the Constitution of the United States. The American government is Baptist. And who does not know the paramount influence of Virginians, and Virginia laws, in the formation of the governments of the other States, all of which at last adopted fully, in principle, and in practice, the doctrine of "Religious Freedom." All these glorious results reflect additional lustre upon the fame of "The Early Baptists of Virginia." Into these considerations, however, I do not enter. I confine myself to Virginia. Here the Baptist triumph was completed.

But, in the statement of the facts now submitted, have we not, the question naturally arises, done injustice to our brethren of the other denominations that then prevailed in the Commonwealth?

From the brow, gentlemen, of any patriot of "those times that tried men's souls," far be it from me to pluck a single laurel. I give, and will ever give, all "honor to whom

honor" is due. That very many of all denominations, Presbyterians, and even Methodists, and Episcopalians, labored together with the Baptists, is well known. But it is equally well known, that whatever action they took in favor of full religious freedom, was due to them as individuals, and not as churches. The Episcopal Churches, as such, resisted, as they are all obliged to concede, earnestly, and to the end, all change, and sought by every possible means to retain their hold upon the power and patronage of the government. Of the Methodist Churches, Dr. Hawks, says:—"They claimed to be nothing more than members of a religious society, formed within the bosom of the established church at home, and extended to America. The language of the Methodist Preachers was, that 'All who left the Church, left the Methodists.' Nay, such was the avowed attachment of the society, that in public opinion it was so far identified with the Church, as to share with it the odium which from political causes, then rested on the establishment in Virginia. The Methodists were suspected of being inimical to the liberties of America. This suspicion in the minds of many, originated in nothing but the known adherence of the society to an ecclesiastical system which had the support of the civil power."* He adds, "In these petitions, all classes in the community, with the exception of Churchmen and Methodists, joined; these [Churchmen and Methodists] sent in their respective petitions, for the continuance of the establishment."† The Presbyterian Churches, except the gallant little Hanover Presbytery, which, as we have before seen, lived in the neighborhood, and were under the influence of Patrick Henry, generally favoring or opposing every measure which he favored or opposed, occupied a middle ground between vassalage and freedom. They all united to put down the establishment, but then, most of them

* Hist. of Epis. in Va., p. 133.

† Hawks as above, p. 139.

wished to be incorporated—in other words, established—themselves, and to have the power by law, to assess, that is, to tax the people, for their own support. Dr. Semple, says of them all, that “The ministry and the people, were so much at variance, as to paralyze all their exertions.” The Baptists alone, throughout the whole struggle, presented an unbroken front. The Hanover Presbytery, and Patrick Henry himself, in some of our deepest struggles, not only forsook us, but, as we have seen, took opposite ground, and sought with all their ability, to prevent our success. This was emphatically true when the bill was under discussion before the legislature, “Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion,” which enacted for that purpose, the assessment of taxes upon the people. They sent up a memorial declining an incorporation, *not abstractly*, but in that *particular form* which was proposed, because it offered to incorporate the ministry apart from the people, since this would make the ministry independent of the religious communities to which they belonged; would make them sole managers of the pecuniary interests of the Churches; and would be a returning to the policy of Popery. They deprecated legislation by the State, as to any thing spiritual belonging to the Church, such as pointing out “articles of faith,” “settling modes of worship,” “or directing internal government;” but admitted it as to *temporalities*. They prayed that the scheme of assessment adopted, if any were, might be “on the most liberal plan,” and proceeded to submit such a plan, “agreeable to which alone,” they averred, “*Presbytery are willing to admit a general assessment* for the support of religion by law;” the leading principles of which have been already fully stated. This bill, and also the bill, “Incorporating the Protestant Episcopal Church,” received, as we have seen, the powerful advocacy of Henry. The latter was passed into a law. The intelligence of this fact, as it spread throughout the State,

filled the people with equal surprise and alarm. The Baptists saw that they must fight this battle alone, and against fearful odds. They therefore with augmented energy and industry, made their preparations. They appealed confidently to their fellow citizens. Their memorials written with singular perspicuity, force, and conclusiveness, were signed by thousands of every sect, and of no sect. The masses, with whom republicanism had become the dominant political faith, now at length, regarded the church establishment, and all legislation upon religious subjects, as an inseparable appendage of monarchy, the last vestige of which they had determined to destroy in Virginia. "Kingcraft, priestcraft, and spiritual domination," were doomed. From their purpose nothing could turn them aside. They were too powerful to be slighted, and too vigilant to be cheated by ineffectual measures. Politicians of all classes, saw, that submission to their wishes was a necessity unavoidable. Under this pressure, the Hanover Presbytery again met in annual session. They too had taken the alarm. These subjects came up for discussion. Efforts were made to induce the body to recede from its position of the last year, and they did so by resolution, but no memorial or other address, was sent *by them* to the legislature. A *Convention* of Presbyterians was called by "invitation," says Dr. Foote, "signed by the ministers, and several private members." Such a body was of course unofficial, whose proceedings the Hanover, and every other Presbytery, could, if policy should in future so dictate, safely disregard. This Convention met at Bethel, August the 10th, 1785, and protested against all assessments by law, for religious purposes, and all incorporations of religious denominations.* Popular as he was in every sense, this year Patrick Henry lost his election before the people. The legislature met. The Baptists and their allies, and also their opponents were

* Foote's Sketches, &c., pp. 341-344.

at their posts. The assessment project was defeated, and subsequently the law "incorporating the Episcopal Church" was repealed. Thus, it will be seen that in the statements before you, while I have endeavoured properly to represent, "The Early Baptists of Virginia," I have also done full justice to our brethren of all the other denominations. How truly disinterested and sublime were all the movements of the Baptists! Who can contemplate them, without feeling an unbounded admiration! They sought no advantages for themselves peculiarly, but for all; the dominion of truth and freedom; the glorious principles of the gospel of Christ. All honor to "The Early Baptists of Virginia." Impartial history cannot always refuse to do them justice.

VI. The position of our ministers and people in the commonwealth, demands in conclusion, a few moments of our attention.

That a body of men so elevated in their moral position, so active in their exertions for the public good, and so influential in all their movements, should subsequently have been permitted to be so much depreciated in the public esteem, as we find them to have been, is to us, matter of profound surprise. I should have performed my task unfaithfully, gentlemen, if, before I conclude this discourse, I did not essay at least, to defend our Virginia Fathers from aspersions under which they have so long labored, and to place them before "The American Baptist Historical Society," in their true character. Churches, as well as families and nations, have their pride of ancestry. To this praiseworthy feeling, poets and historians in all ages, have been wont to defer. The heroes of Homer were all allied to the gods, whose feelings were in every conflict, enlisted on the side of their respective descendants. Virgil represents the Roman people as springing from a long line of Latin Kings, and the founder of their city as a demigod,

the son of Mars. Even Livy, the best of Roman historians, introduces his work by similar fabulous accounts. These extravagances are not all on one side, as the depreciations of our ancestors evince. The disposition to exalt our friends, is coupled with an involuntary inclination to depress our opponents. Accordingly they have been currently represented as indeed, eminently religious and conscientious men, estimable in their places, but without refinement, destitute of learning, and to a great extent, bigotted enthusiasts! All this is utterly unfounded, and ought long since to have been corrected. How did such an impression regarding "The Early Baptists of Virginia" originate? By what means has it been so long perpetuated? The solution of both these inquiries is easy to any one who will carefully study the whole subject.

The extraordinary triumphs of the Baptists are at the bottom of it all. These mortified various influential parties insufferably, by whom they were privately, and through the press and the pulpit, as we have seen, instantly and ceaselessly assailed. They thought to treat them in Virginia as they had been treated in Germany and England, to "tread them under foot, with foul reproaches and most arrogant scorn." Nor, incredible as it may appear, have they been entirely unsuccessful. These "foul reproaches," this "arrogant scorn," in the consciousness of their integrity and the pride of their strength, they did not deign to notice. Their enemies persevered in their aspersions and defamations. They were unanswered. Subsequent writers entered into their spirit, and copied their style. Whether abused as by Burk and Jarrett, misrepresented as by Dr. Hawks, ignored as by Dr. Foote, or caricatured as by Dr. Alexander, it was the same thing. And among these defamers, involuntarily such it is hoped, I regret to say, are some in our own ranks, who seem to think themselves at liberty patronizingly to apologize for the deficiencies of men

to whom they themselves are no more than molehills by the side of "Old Olympus." Thus, a form of public sentiment was manufactured, which, on account of the quarter whence it sprung, and because it was unresisted, sunk at length deeply into the literature of the times, and became comparatively permanent. At first, for much of the revolutionary spirit that prevailed among the masses, and especially those radical principles of liberty, political and religious, so offensive to the clergy and their friends, *they were held responsible*. Not a few of those who were anxious, subsequently, to appropriate to themselves the chief honors, were at that time sufficiently silent; because they had many reasons to doubt whether the British yoke would, after all, be broken, and for their own safety they were ever especially mindful. Had the American revolution failed, the Baptists of this country would undoubtedly have been involved in an obloquy as deep as was that of their brethren of a former age, in Germany. Their offences would here also have been expiated by "the blood of myriads." Virginia would have been the Munster of America. It was, therefore, precisely because they possessed, so eminently, intelligence, public influence, and moral force; those very qualities now denied them, and for the want of which they have been so long defamed, and which they exercised so successfully; that this feeling of dislike, not to say hatred, arose, and has ever since been cherished, by all the other denominations. They are gravely charged, in learned and popular histories of the times, and which none of our own people, since the days of Semple, have ever contradicted, but have quoted apparently with approbation, with being influenced in all they did by such motives only as malignant hatred to the Established Church; an overweening zeal to advance their own interest as a sect; and a general restless and disorganizing spirit; as guided by no patriotism; and

as being the mere tools of a political party.* Gentlemen, are these slanders to remain always unanswered? All the implications contained in these, and like representations, severally and as a whole, and all others of like character, from whatever source, here, and in your presence, I repel, in the name, and on behalf of the noble dead. They were capable of being influenced by no such feelings, or motives. They sought no sectarian advantages. They were impelled by no malignity. No spirit of revenge animated their proceedings. They maintained courteously, but firmly, only those doctrines which their fathers had advocated for seventeen centuries. They desired only the dominion of those great principles embodied in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the results, we see another happy illustration of the great fact, that although after many a century of suffering and strife, and the sacrifice of millions of treasure, and tens of thousands of the purest lives ever looked upon by the sun from heaven, still,

“Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again ;
The eternal years of God are hers ;
While error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers.”

The Early Baptists of Virginia were not, as a whole, nor are the present Baptists of Virginia, the elite ; the aristocratic few who revel in luxury, and pride themselves, not upon what they themselves are, but upon the exalted position and great deeds of a long since buried ancestry. They were the masses of the people ; the bone and sinew of the country. Our churches contained, with these, many of the poor and obscure, who were “rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom.” These classes proved to be the truest, best and most useful friends of the cause. It was from the rich, the proud, and the high born, of which they contained so many,

* See Hawks' History, pp. 121, 122, 137, 138 ; Dr. John H. Rice's Pamphlets ; Dr. Alexander's Autobiography ; and Semple's History, pp. 234, 245.

that the cause received much detriment, and the aspersions of our enemies were so long and so injuriously perpetuated. Large numbers of such, compelled by their consciences, united with the Baptists, and were ever afterwards boasting of the sacrifices of society, friendships, and refinements, they made to do so. To talk of "the poor Baptists;" to tell of "the ignorance" of some Baptist minister they had either seen, or heard of; to detail the opposition of their friends, or their families, to their throwing themselves away with such a rustic people; became with them a passion. It invaded the pulpit. Often, indeed, was the same strain heard from the poorest of the community, who wished to be in fashion with their more cultivated brethren and sisters. The effect upon their own minds was most lamentable; their families generally had, in consequence, no respect for Baptist ministers, or people, avoided them, and united with other denominations, who were, perhaps, really less intelligent, cultivated, and wealthy, than the Baptists; and our opponents, and the world, were ever ready to believe, and repeat, their outrageous defamations. Not all, thank God, of the exalted, the rich, and the cultivated, were of this temper. Not a few there were, in whose veins coursed the blood of the proudest cavaliers in the Commonwealth, who loved the Saviour, his truth, and his people, too much, and whose sense of propriety was too pure, to allow them to act so foolishly. The Baptist people, as a whole, were, in all respects, equal at least to the same number of men and women, taken promiscuously in society, in this or in any other country. It is time, Gentlemen, that these great and good men were effectually vindicated. In the cold shadows that have been permitted to gather over and obscure their fame, true religion has suffered, and continues to suffer, immeasurably. Baptists owe it to the revered dead; they owe it to the cause of truth; they owe it to themselves; they owe it to posterity, to rescue them,

though late, from the withering grasp of their heartless pursuers. Not much longer can they be kept beneath the clouds of pampered envy and foul detraction. Truth will prevail at last. Then will it be seen and acknowledged, that a more brilliant army, a more gallant array of the soldiers of Christ, never fought or conquered.

The early Baptists of Virginia were reproached upon the presumption that their ministers were uneducated men. This feature is nauseously prominent in the frequent references to them of Dr. Alexander. Of other denominations, the ministry desire to be judged by their best specimens. Ours, they insist upon judging by the worst. Were Baptists, even in those days, indifferent to the advantages of education? Why, then, at the meeting of the General Committee, a body which represented the views of all the Baptists in the State, held in August, 1788, did they determine to originate a college for the denomination in Virginia, which they urged onward for several years, and deferred only because of the pecuniary pressure of the times? Is not this, of itself, a sufficient evidence of the feelings of our ministers and people on this subject? Were the ministers of that day, however, in the truest and best sense of learning, really uneducated men? No, Gentlemen, very far from it. Some of them were graduates of colleges, in this country, and in Europe. I will not say that, for all practical purposes, these were more learned than many of their brethren whom they honored, and with whom they delighted to labor. Cast your eye along their thick and serried ranks. Who are they? They are the Stearnses, the Marshalls, the Harrises, the Craigs, the Armsteads, the Wallers, the Fords, the Williamses, the Tolers, the Clays, the Nelsons, the Barrows, the Walkers, and hundreds of others. They came from the pulpits of the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, the Congregational, and other Churches; from their seats in the colonial legislature; from the bar

of our courts; from the roll of army officers; from the teacher's chair; from the offices of the justices and sheriffs of the counties; and from the broad fields of the wealthy planter. The number of the strikingly illiterate was not, perhaps, greater than of those who had passed through college formalities. But the great mass of our ministry *were not classically educated*. How could they have been? Still, their learning was not inferior to that of the best portion of the people. Were men in the other professions all classically educated? Was Patrick Henry classically educated? Were Bland, Pendleton, Carrington, classically educated? Was Washington himself classically educated? Of our ministers, the education of not a few, literary and professional, was equal, to say the least, with that of any of these truly great and distinguished men. That they had not the theological training of the schools, we have reason to be devoutly thankful; since there then existed not upon the face of the earth an institution of this class, Protestant or Papist, the theology of which was not radically and incurably corrupt. From the Bible alone, which they studied daily, with clear heads, warm hearts, and fervent piety, they derived their theology. Of the true teachings of the word of God, they consequently knew more than did all the Doctors of the Sorbonne, of Wittenburg, of Geneva, of Oxford, or of Cambridge.

Is it pretended that, as a whole, or even generally, their sermons were greatly inferior in style and elocution, and that their manners in the pulpit were, for that day, rude and unpolished?

That there were some among them, here and there an individual, obnoxious to this imputation, and that the same was true to an equal extent, in proportion to numbers, of most of the other denominations, there can be no doubt. But of them as a class, it was far from being true. Baptist ministers generally, destitute of learning or eloquence, rude,

repulsive! Why, then, gentlemen, were their discourses always heard by immense crowds, who were swayed and agitated by them, to an extent unprecedented? Why were the splendid parish churches, whose magnificent ruins stand to this day, in many of the lower counties of Virginia, the mouldering monuments of colonial pride and extravagance, forsaken by their polished and courtly congregations, who eagerly followed these plebeians, hung upon their words with wrapt and delighted attention, and by hundreds united with our churches? By what power did they overthrow the triple walled citadel of the Establishment; sever the relations between church and state; carry the whole people with them; and impress their doctrines irrevocably upon the government of the country? If without their aid, and loaded besides with repulsiveness, they did all this, then of what practical value are learning, eloquence, refinement, and polished manners; since, destitute of them all, "The Early Baptists of Virginia" did more than, in any other age or country, ever was accomplished by the great, the mighty, and the wise? If some of them were "no orators," and this is certainly true, where is the denomination every one of whose ministers is a Whitefield, a Hall, or a Chalmers? Our ministers, and our people, had all the learning, wealth, refinement, and influence, necessary for the accomplishment of those great purposes to which, in the providence of God, they were called. Not a few of them were men of amazing attainments. The Marshalls, the Harrises, the Williamses, the Walkers, the Lunsfords, the Stranghans; and in later times, the Semples, the Cloptons, the Goodalls, the Kerrs, and the Broadbuses; these, and such as these, possessed an amount of mental vigor, of intellectual cultivation, and pulpit power, that justly placed them on a level with any other ministers of their day, and country. Of eloquence, they were the very chiefs. With unsurpassed success, did they proclaim

“Truths of power,
In words immortal. Not such words as flash
From the fierce demagogue’s unthinking rage,
To madden for a moment, and expire;
Nor such as the wrapt orator imbues
With warmth of facile sympathy, and moulds
To mirrors radiant with fair images,
To grace the noble fervor of an hour;
But words which bear the spirit of great deeds,
Winged for the future.”

To us, and especially to “The American Baptist Historical Society,” have “The Early Baptists of Virginia” bequeathed the custody of their illustrious name; their sacred honor. You, Gentlemen, will not prove recreant to the trust. Nor will the sons of Virginia, who have inherited the sunny fields in which they achieved their conquests, now so full of fruit, and flowers, and beauty. Will you, shall we, who have entered into their labors, longer refrain to drive back their assailants, by a proper exhibition of the truth? He who can coldly, silently, heartlessly, permit their noble bearing, their generous sacrifices, their exalted deeds, to be buried in darkness, deserves not the name of Baptist. And he who, with parricidal hand, shall assist in their defamation, deserves, and will ere long receive, the execration of all good men. More and more precious with each revolving year, shall become the memory of our fathers. No element of security, moral or material, will we permit to remain unimproved, which may point with impressive force that important lesson, commended no less by the instincts of the universal heart, than by the testimony of all experience, that any people who would expect the blessing of God, insure their own honor, and hope for future success, must preserve as an inviolable treasure the broad ægis upon which are emblazoned the virtues and achievements of their forefathers.

CONSTITUTION OF THE SOCIETY.

ARTICLE 1. This Department shall be called THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

ARTICLE 2. The object of this Society shall be to collect and preserve all manuscripts, documents and books, relating to Baptist History; the biographies of individuals, etc., etc., and to publish such historical and antiquarian works as the interests of the Denomination may demand.

ARTICLE 3. This Society shall be composed of two classes of members, to wit; 1st. Contributing members; who shall consist of all such persons as may make an annual payment of one dollar to the Treasurer, or as may collect and contribute to the society any valuable historical documents, periodicals or manuscripts. 2d. Corresponding members; of whom not less than one in each State shall be appointed. All members shall be elected by the Board of Curators.

ARTICLE 4. The officers of the Society shall consist of a President, eight Vice-Presidents, a Corresponding and a Recording Secretary and a Treasurer, who with twelve other persons shall constitute a Board of Curators. The officers shall be elected by "The American Baptist Publication Society" at each annual meeting, and shall hold their offices until their successors are appointed.

ARTICLE 5. The Board of Curators shall have the control and management of all such manuscripts, periodicals and books, as may be collected by or contributed to the Society, and they shall present a report of their proceedings to "The American Baptist Publication Society," at each anniversary, and shall fill all vacancies that may occur in their body.

ARTICLE 6. This Society shall hold an annual meeting on the evening succeeding the Anniversary of the Publication Society, when a Historical Address shall be delivered by such person, and on such subject, as the Board of Curators may designate.

ARTICLE 7. Any Society organized for the same or a similar object, may become a co-operating body with this, by opening a correspondence with this Society, and furnishing a copy of their constitution, reports and publications.

The officers and delegates of such co-operating societies shall be entitled to a seat at the meetings of this Society.

ARTICLE 8. The Board of Curators shall meet as often as they think proper, and shall pass such by-laws as they may deem requisite for their government.

ARTICLE 9. This Constitution may be altered or amended at any annual meeting of "The American Baptist Publication Society," by that body.

OFFICERS AND CURATORS FOR 1856-7.

PRESIDENT.

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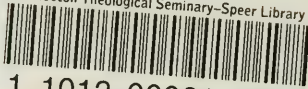
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